

In their own words

Selected writings by journalists on Mongolia, 1997 to 1999

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Preface

At the start of its 1990 transition to a democracy and a market economy, Mongolia opened up to the outside world. Visitors to Mongolia are now drawn from countries across the globe. Prominent amongst these visitors have been international journalists. Free to report as they see fit because of the freedoms brought by the democratic revolution, they have found a country tackling the challenges of the free market economy.

As with so many observers of the country, it doesn't take long for journalists to notice the resourcefulness and resilience of Mongolians, not to mention their hospitality. As a nation Mongolia is working hard to achieve economic self-reliance, with the support of development agencies, bilateral donors, and the many agencies of the United Nations working in Mongolia.

We have often found that journalists can be the best messengers for telling the story of this dynamic country. They have the independent perspective to grasp the big picture, good and bad. It would be a Herculean task to try and compile all the articles in the English language printed in the past three years (1997 to 1999), which is a testament to how much Mongolia's international profile has risen. We have not chosen to do this. Instead we have chosen a selection of articles that can give a snapshot of the phenomenon known as transition.

As a development agency that supports sound governance, UNDP has been building human capacities that are essential for a free press in Mongolia and thus enjoys a strong relationship with both local and international media. We are in contact with journalists on a daily basis and regularly take them to see development projects that benefit from inputs from Government, UNDP and local communities.

We hope this book proves to be a valuable research tool for anybody wanting to learn more about this exciting country.

June 1999

Douglas Gardner

UNDP Resident Representative

UB Post

09-09-97

Rising poverty flagged as Mongolia's greatest threat

New United Nations-backed report rates the country's human development

By Jill LAWLESS

Rising poverty and vulnerable food security are potential time bombs threatening Mongolia's future.

That's the finding of a comprehensive new report produced by the Government of Mongolia and the United Nations Development Programme.

Human Development Report Mongolia 1997 assesses the health of the nation from a standpoint that places the wellbeing of the Mongolian people at its core. It looks at such issues as human rights, democracy, health, education and gender equality.

Since 1990, global Human Development Reports have taken the world's pulse, but this one — the product of more than a year's work by 17 Mongolian and foreign researchers — is the first study to focus entirely on Mongolia.

The report praises the strides Mongolia has made in the 1990s as a young and flourishing democracy eager to embrace the global economy.

At the report's launch, UNDP Resident Representative Douglas Gardner praised Mongolia's "rich history and resilient population."

"But not all aspects of change have had a positive result," he noted. "The rapid transition has taken its toll on Mongolians."

The report singles out poverty and food security

as the two most urgent threats to the country's prosperity.

It notes that the number of poor Mongolians increased by 40 per cent between 1990 and 1996.

Even more worrying is the emergence of chronic poverty that could be passed on from generation to generation.

And there is an increasing disparity among aimags, with some falling farther and farther behind the national average.

"We've flagged the issue of poverty in the aimag centres," noted Shahn Yaqub, a United Nations poverty and development specialist who has spent most of the past year working on the report. "It's possible that it could become extremely stubborn."

Food security — defined as the ability of all people to have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food — was also singled out for concern.

Though the range of foods available in Ulaanbaatar has increased since transition, it's a very different story outside the capital.

Mongolians' daily intake of calories is down from 1989 levels, though it has rallied since the dark days of 1992 and 1993.

Consumption of fruit and vegetables is also down, while malnutrition is up.

Other potential risks are the country's rising reliance on imported food and an increased dependence on livestock,

a sector which could be severely hurt by a single harsh winter.

Yaqub said Mongolia's history, culture and geography make it unique in many respects, and it must find unique solutions to its problems.

"Mongolia is unique in Asia because of its low population density, and because its economy is based on livestock rather than rice."

"So development strategies must be relevant to a livestock-based economy."

"And Mongolia combines a traditional nomadic lifestyle with a modern outlook. What is so striking is that the two populations are not separate; they mix."

"A man I know went to a soum to meet a herder, and found he was hosting the speaker of Parliament in his ger."

"Even in Ulaanbaatar, you can feel the rural life. That rural connection acted as a safety net during the worst of the transition. It was literally a lifesaver — people were able to get food without money."

Health Minister L. Zarig stressed the government's commitment to creating safer, healthier and more peaceful lives for all Mongolians.

"The Mongolian government believes unemployment and poverty alleviation to be its overriding objectives," he said.

United Nations representatives expressed optimism about Mongolia's future.

"Two of the components of human dev-

elopment are health and education — the third is giving people space to use their potential," explained Yaqub.

"Mongolia already has a lot of the necessary social capital, like high literacy and health. There are many capable people in this country, and a lot of potential that needs to be put to work."

"In several areas, though, the country is on a knife-edge, and we've tried to highlight those areas in the report. The problems we've highlighted are solvable. It comes down to priorities."

Speaking for the government, Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan stressed that human development is at the core of the government's market-reform strategies.

"Mongolia has firmly committed to sustainable development that is also human-centred," agreed Nay Htun, the United Nations' Assistant Administrator and Director for Asia and the Pacific.

"Mongolia has to reaffirm the purpose of its transition," said Yaqub.

"What was the point of throwing people's lives into such turmoil? Surely the point is to create a happier society, not just a market economy."

"It's important to stress that it's not a question of choosing between markets and social sectors. Market economies are not a homogenous group. There are many different kinds of markets, some destructive and some mutually beneficial."



Shahin Yaqub

Poverty at its highest level in five years

The only way to fight poverty in Mongolia is for society to use the abilities of the poor and unemployed, said Human Development Report team leader, Shahin Yaqub.

Bangladesh-born Mr Yaqub said the report drew attention to the increasing number of poor people in Mongolia, and the emergence of long-term poverty.

He said the report could be used to obtain information about Mongolian society and economics, and in doing so influence those responsible for these policies.

According to the Human Development Report, released last week at a special ceremony attended by Mongolian Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan, poverty has been increasing in Mongolia and is at its highest level in any year since 1991.

"The number of poor people in Mongolia has risen by 132,000 people in the past five years, placing greater pressure on already inadequate safety nets, and making it increasingly difficult to meet fiscal targets to keep the

macroeconomy stable," the report says.

The statistics come from research by the National Human Development Programme - formerly the National Poverty Alleviation Programme.

Mr Yaqub suggests the name was changed as a result of cooperation.

"Poverty is only part of human development," he said.

Mr Yaqub, who worked on the report since last Spring with a group of 17 researchers, said many

social indicators were slow and it would not be for some time that the country would understand the damage caused by the problems occurring in education today.

"For instance, the Mongolian literacy rate is about 97 per cent, but we will only be made aware of today's problems as the next generation is educated," he said.

He said there was no specific budget allocated for the Human Development Report, and as a result he could not comment on the total cost.

Report a first for Mongolia

by D. Narantuya

Mongolia's first Human Development Report was released last week.

Issued by the Mongolian Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the report was printed in Mongolian (3500) and English (1500) language.

At the launch of Human Development Report on Friday, UNDP resident representative Douglas Gardner said the report's main goal to support and indoctrinate improvement in the quality of life for Mongolians.

"It is not just a report on economic issues, social matters and public policy, but it is rather an attempt to cohesively bring together all of the issues that impact the holistic human being in Mongolia," Mr Gardner said.

"In order to do this, the Human Development Report urges the decision-makers to place human development at the centre of policies," he said.

"I often like to refer to the experience in Brazil - that country's Human Development Report enlivened political and social debate in a way that had not been seen before. I think this report

could do the same for Mongolia.

"Mongolians say that increasing economic growth will reduce the poverty, but we propose that reducing poverty will enhance economic growth."

In addition to increasing poverty, Human Development



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1997

Report 1997 highlights food security as a new form of vulnerability.

The report states that there has been a rapid decrease in the average calorie intake of Mongolians, as well as a major reduction per capita in production of vegetables, cereals, eggs, milk and meat products.

"The incidence of Mongolian infants born with low birth weights has increased from 4.5 per cent in 1990 to 5.6 per cent in 1996," the report says.

"A 1992 UNICEF survey indicated that 12 per cent of children under 48 months old had low weight for age, while 26 per cent were low in height for their age."

The UNDP is planning to update the report every 18 months to two years. It is free of cost to members of the public.

MONGOLIAN PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS

Immediate Hopes	%	Long-term Hopes	%
To be employed	20.2	Good health	23
Increase income	28.0	Wealthy life	17.8
To be educated	13.4	Good job	17.0
Improve living conditions	12.1	Money	10.7
Change jobs	6.7	Education	10.6
Get health service	6.6	Qualifications	9.8
Get married	1.5	Good family life	8.1
Job promotion	1.5	Others	1.7
Others	1.8	Good career	1.3

Source: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1997

Japanese prof delivers report

Mongolia's first Human Development National report was published last year in collaboration of the United Nations Development Programme. A second report is expected in 1999.

Professor Ryokichi Hirono from the University of Tokyo, a consultant on the first report, arrived in Ulaanbaatar last week to supervise the 1997 report and exchange views for the 1999 edition.

Prof Hirono acknowledged the report as important and informative for politicians, parliamentarians, and non-governmental organisations. He noted that it will aid in obtaining adequate data in economy, nature, ecology and other sectors.

"As not everything was perfect in the first report, we decided to make the second one, consisting of two parts. In the first part we shall summarise events taken place in the last two years, as well as the most pressing issues facing society. The second part will comprise information on the aimag level," explained Prof Hirono.

He added that the report will provide information concerning provincial achievements.

"I am pleased that the people I met in Mongolia, the cabinet members, parliamentarians and the NGOs, shared the same opinion that economy and social development should be interrelated," Prof Hirono said.

The visit marked Prof Hirono's 25th trip



Professor Ryokichi Hirono

to Mongolia. He first came to Mongolia in 1990.

"The country has undergone tremendous changes in the last eight years," he said. "Mongolia's economy has been sluggish. However, the Mongolians must not underestimate technology and technological progress."

Prof. Hirono is the president of the Japan Society for International Development and the chair of the Mongolian Development Policy Support Group of Japan. His group consists of 45 Japanese scholars. He noted that his colleagues have seen the report and are interested in visiting Mongolia.

Mongol Messenger

15-04-98

World Bank gives the low down on Mongolia's GDP and population

Since 1990, World Bank has released annual survey's of developing nations. Studies include population, economy and the environment.

Mongolia is the sixth largest country in Asia, and the 18th largest in the world. It is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world - one sq. km per 1.5 people. The average annual population growth was 2.4 percent from 1985-1993, and 1.4 percent from 1994-1997. Mongolia ranks 124th for growth rates.

The average age in Mongolia is 64, which ranks it 60th in the world. Mongolian women give birth to an average of 3.5 children, which ranks 86th in the world. The average in western countries is less than two, while many developing countries average five. Mongolia's infant mortality rate per 1000 live births is 40, a ranking of 137.

Statisticians noted that Mongolia's decreasing population growth and rise in average age is an indication that the nation's social and economic sectors are stabilising.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person in Mongolia is US\$360, which ranks it with 64 other countries to have a GDP under US\$390. The World Bank has included Mongolia on its list of low income nations. The GDP growth per person was -3.3 percent from 1985-1993, 2.3 percent in 1994, 6.3 in 1995, 2.4 percent in 1996, and 3.3 percent in 1997. Its current GDP increase is average amongst the world's nations.

The highest average level of inflation in Mongolia was 268.4 percent in 1993. It has decreased since 1994, and stabilised in 1997 at 17.5 percent.



Taking World Population Day seriously

Mongolians are gearing up for World Population Day, which will be held on July 11. The United Nations Population Foundation will organise the one-week campaign.

Topics for discussion during information seminars include the present situation of the world population, research works on child-birth health in Mongolia, and the 2000 population census.

A keynote speaker during the campaign last week was Damien Volfart, the resident counselor for the sub-programme on child-birth health in Mongolia. Mr Volfart's report informed the public on the strengths and weaknesses of child-birth in this country.

"Even though the Mongolian government is supporting child-birth, it is been decreasing for the recent years. This is related blood shortage, and kidney problems

amongst pregnant women," he noted.

Volfart mentioned that despite lacking modern medical equipment and technical provisions, Mongolian doctors and nurses are working well. He indicated that many contraceptive devices are available in Mongolia, however, more propaganda is needed to advertise their proper use. Out of every 1000 pregnancies, 262 are aborted.

Another concern for Mr Volfart was sexually transmitted diseases which he says is steadily rising. A problem he admits is that testing equipment is lacking, particularly in rural areas. "There is a wrong conception that Mongolian



people think that only women should undergo the STD testing," he said

Mongol Messenger

08-07-98

Population reaches 2.5 million

Mongolia's most recent unofficial figure for population is 2.5 million. A census taken at the end of 1997 showed 2.38 million.

Officials agree that a number of problems have resulted from the population explosion in Mongolia, including food supplies, health, and family planning. In order to

cope with the problems, Mongolia is working with the UNDP and Population Fund.

Mongolia has conducted eight official census' over the past 77 years. The last was in 1989, when the population officially exceeded 2 million. The next general census will be conducted in 2000.

Mongol Messenger

21-10-98

A call for love at Poverty Alleviation Week

By Ch. Baatarbeel

"Let's love, respect and support each other," is the motto for Mongolia's third poverty alleviation week.

This week's International Poverty Alleviation week was kicked off last Friday at a ceremony hosted by Health and Social Welfare Minister Sha. Batbayar and

Poverty Alleviation Programme chairperson S. Onon.

The government sponsored programme aims to decrease poverty, which has risen stiffly through this decade. The health minister called for an updated system to determine what families qualify for living in poverty. 1997 figures revealed 587,741 people and 149,697 families in poverty. This is more than a quarter of the

population. Projections show that these numbers have gone up this year. The programme intends to have poverty levels down to 10 percent by the year 2000.

Batbayar praised the United Nations and its umbrella organisations for their assistance in project. But he added that Mongolians should work hard to take the problem by themselves, rather than relying on international

organisations.

Mrs. Onon identified 21,300 eligible people have given loans since 1996 through project. Soft credit loans of Tg100,000 were given to individuals and sometimes up to Tg400,000 for families. A total of Tg2.2 billion has been issued since 1996. 60 percent of the loans are used for fund raising and scale projects.

Poverty measures put in the spotlight at conference

A gathering of leading Mongolian thinkers and technicians-including government officials, parliamentarians, international organizations, academics and NGOs-met yesterday at government house to address issues on measuring poverty in Mongolia. The meeting was organized by the National Statistics Office, under the leadership of Ms. Davaasuren, and was supported by UNDP.

While there is argument on the seriousness of poverty in Mongolia, views differed on how widespread it is and what are the appropriate responses. The day-long "think tank" allowed the many interested parties to address

options on measuring poverty. It was recognized that poverty goes beyond mere income issues. It must also include measures of access to, and use of, social services like health, education, and water sanitation, as well as measures of nutrition and individual well-being. Special measures are needed for the vulnerable such as children, the unemployed and single women heads of household.

Two particular concerns raised by the participants were consistency of data and cost-effectiveness for collecting information. The desire is to provide decision-makers in Mongolia with quality data so that

the emphasis is placed on real actions to combat poverty in a targeted fashion, rather than debate on the validity of measurements.

Likewise, participants identified the need to coordinate activities of the government and external sources to ensure cost-effectiveness and use of scarce resources. In this regard, the NGO is the lead Mongolian organization focusing on a multitude of key issues, including poverty measures.

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Poverty will fall, Mongolia tells UN

Mongolia aims to slash poverty by 10 per cent by the year 2000.

That was the message of J. Enkhsaikhan, Mongolia's standing representative at the United Nations, to the 52nd sitting of the UN General Assembly.

During the session, representatives of 39 nations, including Mongolia, reported on their nations' implementation of summit decisions about social development.

"Mongolia is implementing the 20/20 Convention — spending 20

per cent of the national budget and 20 per cent of foreign assistance on social development," Enkhsaikhan told delegates. "Mongolia is facing many difficulties during this period of democratic development and economic reform, but the government of Mongolia is carrying out effective measures in many ways."

He also mentioned that as follow-up to the Washington Microcredit Summit last February, the government organized a national session in June on

extending the microcredit programme, which is designed to give poor families opportunities to increase their income with the help of small business loans.

Mongolian representatives also emphasized the importance of the Mongolian Human Development Report, published last month with the help of the United Nations Development Programme, as a research resource and policy-making tool.

Mongolia needs better seeds

By N. OYUNBAYAR

The failure of this year's grain harvest has left Mongolia with a severe shortage of seeds for next year's planting.

"A decline in seed quality in this country is the main reason harvests have decreased," says Sh. Gungadorj, head of the Mongolian Farmers and Flour-Producers Association.

"So there's a need to grow new sorts of seeds in the country."

Gungadorj says he is pleased with the results of a pilot project to introduce hardy "super-elite" seeds from Kazakhstan.

The project, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and the United Nations Development Programme, distributed 200 tonnes of Saratov-29 seed – chosen because of its hardiness, high yield and resistance to drought – to 11 economic entities for sowing over 1200 hectares in Tov, Selenge Dornod and Khentii aimags.

"We have gathered the harvest and got respectable results," says Gungadorj. "The seeds have given a comparatively good harvest at a time of difficult weather conditions."

"We have gathered more than 1300 tonnes of grain from a 1200-hectare area and chosen more than 930 tonnes from this harvest for seeds for next year's planting."

"It means the harvest has given 70 per cent yield. The remaining 30 per cent will be used for merchandise and fodder."

Gungadorj's company, AgroPro, was selected again in this September's tender and next year will be responsible for distributing 400 tonnes of the second-generation elite seed for planting.

By the year 2000, he says, 25 per cent of the country's grain fields will be sown with seeds derived from the super-elite batch.



Strong Kazakh seeds the key for Mon 97/204

By D. Narantuya

Strong, cold acclimatised grain, a good harvest and proper management have sown the seeds for success for the Mon 97/204 project.

Supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry and the UN Development Programme, the project was implemented by Agropro, a local firm. Started in 1997, Mon 97/204 resulted in

1300 tonnes of crop this autumn. The yield is the result of 200 tonnes of super elite 'Saratov-29' generation seeds imported from Kazakhstan by the UNDP. The seeds, which have been used in Mongolia for 30 years and have adapted to the harsh climate, were planted on 1200 ha of land by 11 farms in Tov, Hentii and Selenge aimags.

Sh. Gungaadorj, the Executive Director of Agropro, said that 930 tonnes of the yield have been se-

lected as seeds for next year's harvest.

530 tonnes will be given to the 11 farms which harvested the crop this year and the remaining 400 tonnes will be given to other selected farms. The Kazakh seeds proved their worth as the yield was doubled after just one season.

"There are lots of projects in Mongolia, but this one showed its profit after just one year. It is genuine and alive," said Gungaadorj. "By 2000, we think that 19,000

tonnes of first generation seeds can be saved."

"Seeds are the number one issue for Mongolian agriculture. Many farms use non-standard seeds. The first generation of seeds must be altered to their fifth or sixth generations," said Gungaadorj.

Agropro has been experimenting with several sorts of seeds under the umbrella of the project. The company says it has found several types of seed that are suitable for Mongolia's changeable

climate.

One successful seed is the Kontigerskaya-89 sort seed from Novosibirsk, Russia, which has been harvested from 540 ha of land by the Ughtal Tov company. Altan Taria flour company has purchased one tonne of seed for Tg450,000.

"The quality of Altan Taria's flour is dependent on the quality of the seeds. It is encouraging that flour companies are paying attention to their product and the seeds," said Gungaadorj.



A hungry time for Mongolia as the nation struggles to feed itself

By Jill LAWLESS

The 1990s have been lean years for Mongolia – literally.

A report by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, released in October, painted a bleak picture of the food situation in this country. Citing "a serious food deficit," it called for food aid, in the form of grain, to make up for a 90,000-tonne shortfall in cereals supply. Some 23,000 tonnes should take the form of emergency food aid, it said.

That's vastly more than the 6236 tonnes of flour received as food aid in 1996, or the 2640 tonnes donated in the first half of 1997.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, neither the government nor the United Nations has done anything to publicize the report. Government officials admit they are aware of the FAO findings, but say the alarming picture the organization paints is simply business as usual.

"That [90,000 tonnes] is the right figure," confirmed an Agriculture and Industry Ministry official, who did not want his name used. "We want to import 90,000 tonnes of flour. Some of it will be purchased and some will be donations."

"We will also seek aid from donor countries."

Last week, 11,000 tonnes of U.S.-donated grain began arriving in the country, as part of a programme-aid package negotiated last year.

Davadorj, head of the Ministry's Crop-Farming Department, also said every-

thing was normal.

"The situation is not worse than last year," he maintained. "It's manageable."

According to the report, however, the situation is worse than last year. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mongolia was self-sufficient in cereals. But this year's harvest was only 40 per cent of the 1990 level, and the country now produces only 60 per cent of its cereal needs. For the balance, it must rely on imports.

But the 1996 trade deficit of U.S. \$15.4 million – against a U.S. \$2.3 million surplus in 1995 – constrained the government both in importing grain and in investing in Mongolia's shaky grain-growing sector.

Those who work with Mongolia's poor readily admit there is a food problem. Food security – defined as physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food – was flagged as a key threat in the UN-backed Human Development Report Mongolia 1997.

That's a result both of rising poverty and of declining production. Per capita food production in all major categories except milk is down drastically from 1990.

While the FAO report concludes Mongolia is not in danger of widespread famine, it says one in four Mongolian children is chronically undernourished.

That, in a sense, is Mongolia's problem – the problem is chronic rather than acute. The situation is bad, but other countries are



Much of the flour for this bakery must be imported.

worse.

"Malnutrition is not that bad compared to a lot of African countries," says Jacinda Mawson of the Nutrition Research Centre.

Nonetheless, in the last year there have been reports of starvation among prison inmates and conscript soldiers. In February, 32 soldiers based in Sukhbaatar aimag were hospitalized for starvation. And anecdotal reports indicate many residents of aimags including Khovsgol are severely malnourished.

A study conducted this summer by the NRC and World Vision concluded that undernutrition had neither substantially improved nor worsened since 1992. While it did not reveal signs of famine, it found the rate of stunting – a sign of chronic malnutrition – to be more than 20 per cent.

The nation's major nutrition-related problems continue to be rickets – Mongolia has one of the highest levels in the world of the disease, caused by a deficiency of Vitamin D – and anemia, which is found in 40 per cent of Mongolian chil-

dren.

Protein malnutrition is also a problem, "and that could be alleviated by food aid," says Mawson.

"As you know, in Mongolia the main food is meat," says R. Samdamdovj, secretary general of the Mongolian Red Cross Society. "But there must be something supplementary. Without grain, we cannot survive."

"If people have animals they can more or less survive. So the situation is more serious in the suburbs and districts of Ulaanbaatar and the bigger cities than in the countryside."

"In terms of grain, of course there are shortages. In that respect [food aid] is very good."

There are many NGOs in Mongolia that supply food to the poor. Others, like the Red Cross, supply emergency aid in disaster situations. But they are limited by financial constraints.

"We are limited by the capacity of the Society, which relies on external cooperation and aid," says Samdamdovj.

"We have a disaster fund

of food and used clothing, but we are not engaged at the moment. In this period there are not big disasters in any part of the country."

The FAO report suggested food aid could be supplied through the National Poverty Alleviation Programme. But NPAP says it has never been in the food-aid business.

Many believe the long-term solution to Mongolia's food problems lies resuscitating the crop-growing agriculture sector.

"In the long term, it is good to support the agricultural sector," agrees Samdamdovj. "That would give more encouragement and have more effect."

"During the flood last summer in Bayankhongor aimag, USAID provided money with which the Red Cross, together with the Governor's office bought animals to distribute to vulnerable groups."

"Animals support people in the long run. Direct food assistance is less effective in that respect."

The government's stated goal is to make Mongolia becoming self-sufficient in flour by the end of its first term in office. But a report earlier this year by the Asian Development Bank said this "is most unlikely to be feasible."

The FAO report says the sector is very vulnerable and says major investment is needed in nearly all areas – machinery, chemicals, marketing training and research. "The future of grain production looks bleak."

Food situation not so bad, says FAO official

By A. DELGERMAA

According to a report issued by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization in October, Mongolia is facing a food crisis. The report's authors found the country confronting a 90,000-tonne shortfall in cereals supply, and called for 23,000 tonnes of emergency food aid to help make up the deficit.

A recent World Vision study found that nearly one in four Mongolian children suffers from chronic malnutrition.

But Ajmal Qureshi, the FAO's Beijing-based representative for China and Mongolia, came away from a recent visit optimistic about Mongolia's food situation.

"If you look at the economic results achieved in 1997, they are very impressive," he told the UB Post during his February 14-21 stay. "Mongolia has been able to increase grain production and has got inflation down to 17 per cent, which is a great achievement.

"Mongolia's GDP is considerably increased, and the



Amber waves of grain: FAO projects are designed to help Mongolia produce more wheat.

government's policy and programmes are pragmatic and impressive. It all fits in very well with the FAO's special programme on food security."

Qureshi says self-sufficiency in wheat is an important and attainable goal for Mongolia. The FAO, which cooperates with the government of Mongolia through the United Nations Development Programme, is working to help Mongolia achieve it.

"The FAO places great importance on Mongolia, and is committing much effort to help increase its grain production. Mongolia is a vast country, and livestock is clearly an important sector, accounting for a majority of GDP. But wheat is an important crop.

"The FAO has three important GDP projects under our technical cooperation programme on food security

— germplasms, food security and technical economic accounting. We are working closely with the Plant Science and Agriculture Research Institute in Darkhan on developing super high-quality wheat so that Mongolia can be self-sufficient.

"Through another project we are working on the systematic and scientific collection of agricultural economic statistics. It is very important to

have accurate agricultural economic accounting.

"There are also two sub-regional projects. One is the North East Asia agricultural project, which involves sharing experience with other countries in techniques of growing vegetables.

"And Japan is funding a forestry project in Mongolia."

Officials from the Food and Agriculture Ministry of Mongolia have rejected the report's suggestion that Mongolia is unable to manage the cereals shortfall without emergency aid. Qureshi also strikes an upbeat note.

"These projects are sufficient to meet the Green Revolution objectives launched by the government of Mongolia," he asserts. "The FAO will work to attract the attention of donor countries to the government's programme.

"The state of food and agriculture in Mongolia is very confident. Mongolians are very hard working, and the quality of experts, scientists and human resources is impressive.

"I think Mongolia will go ahead and succeed."



Mongolia's seniors have their day

But too many of the nation's elderly are living in poverty

By N. OYUNBAYAR

Mongolia marked the United Nations' International Day of the Elderly October 1 with warm words of respect for the country's senior citizens – and an acknowledgment that the lives of many older people are growing more difficult.

On Wednesday, many business and offices gave gifts and congratulations to their senior employees and organized celebratory performances and film screenings. President N. Bagabandi had his own message for the nation's elderly.

"I send warm and sincere greetings to all elderly people who, without a thought for their own well-being, have lent their strength to the country's independence, freedom and progress," he said.

"Their wealth of experience, wisdom and skill will be vital in overcoming the present difficult period in the life of our country.

"I hope that they will be a support to the state and government and that they will bring up their children and grandchildren with our people's fundamental values, hard-working, honest character, patriotism and tradition of

respect for the state."

But behind the rhetoric lies a harsh reality.

According to a census conducted by the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Organization of Elderly People, Mongolia has 187,335 senior citizens, of whom 133,900 receive pensions of some kind.

Most of these are far from adequate. The average pensioner receives only Tg 6500-Tg 8000 per month.

There is also a great discrepancy between pensions received by pre- and post-1995 retirees. And more than 100,000 pensioners who took early retirement after the 1991 privatization drive receive no pensions at all, only a much lower rate of social assistance.

In his own message to seniors, Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan stressed that a government commission is working to deal with the gap.

Under a government decision announced last month, pensions will rise across the board by Tg 2000 beginning this month.

According to government statistics, 68,632 – 36.6 per cent – of Mongolia's seniors live in difficult circumstances and



Distinguished seniors receive honours on last week's Day of the Elderly.

55,047 fall below the poverty line. Of these, 22,573 are classed as very poor. Fully 70 per cent of the very poor live in Ulaanbaatar.

Statisticians say 21,299 of the nation's senior citizens have no guardians, 3036 are in constant care and 5086 are invalids.

This year's celebration fell on the second anniversary of the passage of a 1995 law designed to establish the social assistance available to the elderly.

President Bagabandi

said living standards of the elderly must be a priority for government and economic leaders.

Several of the country's leading seniors were awarded a variety of state honours in an official Elders' Day ceremony.

They include renowned actress Luvsanjamtsyn Tsogzolmaa; poet, novelist, playwright and screenwriter Sormuunirshiin Dashdoorov; singer Gombyn Tserenkhand, a renowned interpreter of Buryat folk songs; physician Jamyangiin Tserendulam, honoured for his

contribution to the development of pediatric surgery; retired military officer S. Galsan; writer J. Purev; and Ts. Adya, director of the Zuun Khuree company.

Among Mongolia's seniors are 23 centenarians. The oldest Mongolian is 107-year-old Ts. Sambuu of Delger soum, Gov.-Altai aimag.

A government committee has been set up to organize events for the United Nations Year of the Elderly in 1999.

UB Post

19-01-99

It's their year, but poverty stalks many of Mongolia's senior citizens

BY N. OYUNBAYAR

As Mongolia's Year of the Elderly begins, 60 per cent of Mongolia's seniors live in poverty.

That's the figure given by the Mongolian Seniors' Association, which says the government should use the upcoming year to attack poverty among the nation's elders.

1999 has been designated International Year of the Elderly by the United Nations, and the Mongolian government has followed suit by proclaiming a Year of the Elderly for this country.

A national organizing committee, headed by the Prime Minister, has been established, and a budget of Tg 150 million (U.S. \$166,000) allocated for events related to the year.

Mongolia is home to more than 220,000 seniors, defined in this country as women over 55 and men over 60. Most survive on pensions of between Tg 12,000 and Tg 60,000 (\$13.25-\$66) per month.

And the majority who became pensioners before 1994's pension-reform law receive much less than their post-1994 counterparts. Some 70,000 Mongolian seniors are classed as extremely poor.

The Seniors' Association has called on the government to raise the minimum pension level to Tg 30,000 (\$33) per month. At present only 18,000 people receive pensions of more than Tg 30,000 monthly.

The Association's head, J. Tsendsuren, told a press conference last week that seniors have been among those hardest hit by Mongolia's transition to a capitalist economy.

Older workers who were laid off when state-owned enterprises collapsed often found it impossible to get new jobs. And meagre pensions shut seniors out of the privatization process.

"We don't agree with the Democratic Coalition's 1996 election promise to increase all pensions and subsidies by 10 per cent in keeping with the principle equal rights for all,"



Mongolians traditionally respect their elders, but a majority of them live in poverty.

said Tsendsuren. "We need to abolish the enormous differences between pension rates."

He said the many seniors who were sacked or laid off lost not only their jobs but the support of their unions or professional associations. The Mongolian Seniors' Association could be a unifying body for the nation's seniors, he said.

The Association's deputy chief, L. Chuluunbat, argued that society was hurting itself by failing to draw on the experience and wisdom of its elderly citizens.

Mongolia has a long tradition of respect for its elders. This emerges most forcefully at Tsagaan Sar, the lunar new year, when all Mongolians pay respect to their seniors.

Business lay on parties and gifts for their senior workers. Even the President personally greets the nation's 30 or so centenarians.

And seniors do receive a number of concessions, including the right to free or subsidized public transit and some free medical treatment.

Veterans also receive one-time payments of between Tg

200,000 and Tg 500,000.

But, says the Association, it is not nearly enough.

Still, says Tsendsuren, the Seniors' Association does have one advantage. Unlike most of the country's 500 NGOs, the MSA has a concrete law around which to lobby the government.

"There's a government policy on improving the health

and social welfare of the elderly, and a programme to implement this policy," he said.

"The legal framework is there. The job of organizations like ours is to pay attention to the implementation of the programme and the law."

Year of the Elderly activities that have already been announced include the Tg 45

million restoration of the Tarina sanitarium in Tov aimag, which served Mongolia's seniors in socialist times, and the establishment of seniors' culture and recreation centres in Ulaanbaatar and all aimag capitals.

The national committee charged with organizing Year of the Elderly events is slated to meet this week.

Photo by S. ENKHJARGAL

Mongol Messenger

28-10-98

Wasted water taking a toll on Ulaanbaatar

Hydrologists report that Ulaanbaatar's water table has been reduced by 30 percent over the past 30 years due to human impact.

One expert reports that an typical household uses 350 litres of water a day, most of which is wasted. Other impacts are deforestation and erosion from mining and logging. It is estimated that Mongolia has 34.3 cubic km

of water reserve and 6.1 million cubic metres of water depth.

In related news, an ongoing project to drill 45 new wells in central and southern regions is in its second stage. The three year project is assisted by the UNDP, the governments of Austria and Holland and the Swedish International Development agency.



UB Post

22-10-97

Week-long campaign puts poverty in the national spotlight

The United Nations has called poverty the world's most pressing problem. And according to the UN-backed Mongolian Human Development Report, published last month, poverty in this country is on the rise.

That was the sobering message delivered by representatives of the

Mongolian government and the United Nations Development Programme at the October 17 launch of Poverty Eradication Week, which runs through October 24.

"Today there are 1.3 billion people in the world living on less than \$1 a day," said UNDP spokesperson David South.

According to the UN's research, poverty in Mongolia increased 40 per cent between 1990 and 1996. It estimates 19.6 per cent of Mongolians are poor.

In addition to highlighting the problem of poverty, the week is also intended to showcase the work of the National Poverty Alleviation Programme.

Launched in 1994 in collaboration with the UN, the World Bank and the

Asian Development Bank, it has implemented 900 projects throughout the country.

The key to those projects is microcredit – small loans designed to help poor families, especially those headed by women, start small businesses.

B. Chuluuntsetseg, a

single mother of four, received a loan of Tg 650,000 four months ago. She works as a crafts-woman making jewelry from silver, copper, brass and leather.

She has been able to buy a two-room house with a yard, and can now pay her daughter's university tuition fees.

The principle of the loan is to pay 20 per cent back in the second year, 30 per cent in the third year and 50 per cent in the fourth year.

"The purpose of this week-long campaign is to prove that poverty eradication is possible if there is the will," said South.

UB Post

11-11-97

Mongolia needs emergency food aid, says report

Mongolia's food-supply crisis is serious enough to call for emergency food aid, says a report by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

An FAO mission to Mongolia in September and October assessed the country's food-supply situation, which special attention to the crops sector.

Its conclusions are sobering.

One in four children is chronically undernourished. And while Mongolia doesn't face the threat of widespread famine, it "now faces a serious food deficit and only produces some 60 per cent of its estimated cereal needs."

And the report warns of "a growing population of vulnerable, low-income people who have been experiencing a dramatic fall in nutritional standards due to a major deterioration in their economic circumstances."

The study paints a picture of an agricultural sector in dire straits. It notes that, before the collapse of the Soviet

Union, Mongolia produced sufficient cereals – mostly wheat – to meet domestic demand and even to export.

But both crop yields and area harvested have plummeted since then. The 1996 harvest was 70 per cent lower than pre-1990 levels.

The FAO report forecasts the 1997 harvest at 282,000 tonnes – 28 per cent higher than in 1996, but still only 40 per cent of 1990's harvest.

The reliance on imported cereals is creating a dangerous situation. For the 1997-98 marketing year, the report predicts a 90,000-tonne shortfall between requirements and imports, "for which the country needs emergency and programme food assistance."

It calls upon the National Poverty Alleviation Programme to find 23,000 tonnes of emergency food aid for society's poorest, as well as 67,000 tonnes of programme food aid.

In 1996, the country received 6236 tonnes of food aid, largely from

Japan.

Grain production – concentrated mainly in the six aimags of the Central Agricultural Region (Orkhon, Tov, Bulgan, Darkhan, Ovorkhangai and Selenge) – is a vulnerable sector.

Fertilizers and insecticides have not been used in several years, and the good harvest this year is due largely to favourable precipitation.

Mongolia's flour mills are working at only 50 per cent capacity.

"The future of grain production looks bleak," says the report, without substantial investment in machinery, chemicals, marketing, training and research.

The report has warnings, too for the livestock sector, which accounts for 88 per cent of Mongolia's agricultural production. Crumbling infrastructure, cuts to veterinary services and a decline in fodder production are creating an increasingly vulnerable situation for the nation's herders.



Week shines the spotlight on poverty

According to the United Nations-backed Mongolian Human Development Report, one in five Mongolians is poor. Since the democratic transition, poverty has been rising steadily in this country.

The government of Mongolia used the launch of the international Poverty-Eradication Week (October 17-24) to tout the work of its National Poverty Alleviation Programme.

The United Nations-backed programme was launched in 1994 and is slated to run until the year 2000.

Programme chief S. Onon told reporters that NPAP has implemented 2600 projects aimed at increasing the income of the most vulnerable, as well as job-creation, health and education projects.

Its core activity is micro-credit, small loans designed to help the poor and unemployed start up small-scale businesses. Since March 1996, NPAP has distributed U.S. \$2.2 million in start-up loans, ranging from Tg 75,000 to Tg 1 million, to more than 21,000 people.

At the launch of the week's activities, journalists were led on a tour of several successful projects in Ulaanbaatar, including a bakery and a sausage factory in Bayangol district, a shoe workshop in Chingeltei district and flood barriers in Chingeltei district constructed by the unemployed.

"Our goal is to support, in particular, disabled people and poor women heads of household who have no jobs but have the ability and desire to work," said Onon.

The week culminates in a charity concert on Friday (October 23) at the Youth Palace in Ulaanbaatar.

On October 26, NPAP will present Russian jeeps to a number of soums for use as ambulances.



Locals mark Poverty Eradication Week

by B. Indra

Forty-year-old G. Chuluuntsetseg has four daughters and is head of the family. Four months ago she took a loan of Tg496,000 from the National Poverty Alleviation Programme's Women's Development Fund.

By purchasing silver at the black market and making and selling jewellery, Chuluuntsetseg has earned Tg600,000, bought a house and yard, and also paid for her children's schooling. Previously the family of five lived in a one room flat.

Chuluuntsetseg took the loan over four years and is required to pay back 20 per cent in the second year, 30 per cent in the third year, and the remaining 50 per cent in the fourth year.

The success stories of the Women's Development Fund were highlighted last week during the second annual Poverty Eradication Week.

To mark the occasion a media breakfast was held at the Mongolian Press Institute. The ceremony was attended by MP Sharavjamtsiin Batbayar and United Nations Resident Representative, Douglas Gardner.

To honour the work of women's small business under the programme, a two day exhibition and sale was held at the Elba Cen-



An exhibition and sale of small business goods was held at the Elba Centre in Ulaanbaatar last week.

tre in Ulaanbaatar.

Included in the display were children's clothes and shoes made of felt and leather, handmade carpets, traditional Mongolian boots, vegetables and sleeping bags - made by 42 projects in seven districts.

Most of the other women who took loans are generating a monthly income of between Tg15,000 and Tg30,000.

Among these, is the bed-sheet manufacturing Tsekh company, located in the 7th region of the

Bayanzurkh district. Tsekh borrowed Tg800,000 from the Fund in April 1996 and since then has sold goods valued at more than Tg9 million. About Tg2 million was spent on workers' salaries.

A charity concert to aid the Blind Children's Kindergarten, was held on Saturday to commemorate Poverty Eradication Week.

An exhibition of paintings and photographs will be displayed at the Children's Palace (opposite the Bayangol Hotel) until November 1.

Micro-Credit Summit Breaks new Ground

A. GELEGBALSAN

Mongolia's first micro-credit summit was held June 25/26 at Nuht tourist complex near Ulaanbaatar. The summit opening was attended by Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan, head of the 1h Hural Economic Standing Committee Da. Ganbold, head of the Social Policy standing committee H. Hulan, Health Minister L. Zorig, Minister of Agriculture L. Nyamsambuu and UNDP Resident Representative Douglas Gardner. Also in attendance were Orlando Sakei and Fazeel Hussein, who are international micro credit advisors, delegates from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund. More than 100 delegates from Mongolia's 21 provinces were invited to and arrived at the summit. Minister Zorig opened the summit, followed by a speech from

the prime minister, who informed delegates that any micro credit system had to be carefully monitored.

"This micro credit system has to be used as a means of increasing standards of living across the country, not just a method of loaning money and having it returned within a given time span. A sophisticated system of distribution needs to be employed, with careful monitoring by the government of exactly how the money is being utilized". UNDP resident representative Douglas Gardner reiterated a message sent to summit participants by UNDP headquarters administrator James Speth, which described the summit as "one method of elevating the poor from their low standard of living. Today, poverty is one of the reasons for conflict between people and nations and represents a threat to global stability.

There are many nations and peoples who can be saved from poverty by the introduction of appropriate micro credit loan projects. I would hope that Mongolian delegates participating in this summit will sign an ambitious declaration, which was one of the decisions taken at the February '97 Washington DC summit. I wish the delegates luck and success". Gardner also spoke in his own capacity, saying Mongolia's natural resources "have the potential to develop the national economy. But the most important aspect is development of human resources. The aim of this summit is to improve the living standards of the poorest members of the Mongolian community. To enable them to fulfill their potential, not just to issue credit, but assist them in maintaining profit and hence raising their own living standards".

S. Onon, head of the Poverty Alleviation Program Office (PAPO) presented a profile of her organization and the potential of micro credits to the delegates.

President Bagabandi also sent a message of support to the summit, wishing the delegates every success. The summit was broadcast on the Internet. Health Minister Zorig and Douglas Gardner signed a microstart pilot micro credit project on June 26th, which will target low income Mongolians and especially women. It will be used to "strengthen the capacity of a range of local organizations, including PAPO. UNDP has agreed to invest an initial \$1 million in the pilot study. A national micro credit declaration was also signed by the summit delegates. The main emphasis is future micro trends in Mongolia. Of the eight objectives, one addresses the



Douglas Gardner & Health Minister Zorig signing the micro credit pilot project

establishment of loan funds in rural areas and another "encourages cooperation between state and private organizations which are

operating on loans issued by micro credit projects". There's also an emphasis on training locals to manage micro credit schemes. Mongolian

delegates attended an international micro credit seminar in Washington DC in February. The delegates signed a micro credit declaration which

stated its aim to develop micro credit systems amongst 100 million of the poorest people in the world before the year 2005.

02-07-97





UB Post

09-07-97

Rendering the Land Barren



D. Enkhtaivan

Just over 8 percent of Mongolia is forest. UNDP has placed Mongolia on the critical list as regards natural wood reserves for the first time this year.

Ten years ago an embargo on exporting wood was suggested, but over ridden and the wood industry has subsequently expanded. This year that the

Government included limiting wood exports in their annual program. The decision has been passed, but not implemented. Sustainable change has yet to be introduced. An estimated 1.4 million hectares of forest have been logged in the last seven years. Ironically furniture production has slumped and wood factories have been forced to close as the vast

majority of wood is immediately exported to China. Consequently the price of wooden products has increased - wood has become a national commodity. State sales of logs to those living in ger horoolols and rural districts has ceased - there isn't enough wood available. Instead, new wood exporting businesses have been established across the

country, which have continued relentless logging in forested areas. Soil has been eroded and forests destroyed in the name of exportation. It is estimated by environmentalists that even if logging ceased today, it would take 70-100 years for Mongolia's forests to recover. Pine trees make up a full quarter of Mongolia's surviving forests. There is a wood export tax, although wood is classified as a basic and not luxury item. If wood exports were subject to luxury tax, irreversible damage could be avoided. However this change of taxation status has to be swiftly introduced.

Once aware that duty will be introduced on wood exports, logging companies will accumulate massive stockpiles to be freighted out of the country before the tax change. Last year there were approximately 386 fires across the steppe - 173 were attributed to human carelessness and altogether 2,163,600 hectares of forest were completely destroyed. Damage was conservatively estimated at Tg 1.4 billion. Despite this destruction of almost a quarter of Mongolias' forests, people are still being issued with permission to log by the Environment Ministry. 1 square meter of wood is worth around Tg 150,000 in Mongolia. During this spring between 21-32 train carriages of wood left for China almost daily. The national export of wood has to be stemmed while Mongolia still enjoys and benefits from its natural forest reserves.

Violating the Elements

Soil, air and water are all under threat in Mongolia from carelessness, industrial development and urbanization. S. Erdenebilig and Sh. Dawaadorj examine the impact on the land and its people.

There has always been a national pride in Mongolia's vast, unspoiled territory. Even today, the country boasts 35 Specially Protected Areas, divided into four separate categories sites according to their natural resources, historical and scientific interest and sheer natural beauty.

These areas are legally protected by the 1992 Mongolian constitution. The country is also known for its air quality and lack of heavy industry. But environmentalists are still raising the alarm—concerned at stemming the flow of pollution before Mongolia has to combat environmental problems akin to those being faced in the industrialized western world.

Already, an estimated sixty percent of Mongolia's power stations deposit their industrial waste as raw sewage without burial or processing. 64 percent of these power stations emit smoke which isn't filtered and therefore contains chemicals such as carbon and nitrogen dioxide.

Power station officials such as D. Bayarbaatar (director of Ulaanbaatar power station NO.4) admit they are forced to use antiquated equipment which can't filter pollution, while they have no designated, sealed dumping sites.

Meanwhile, Mongolians are renowned for scattering their rubbish across the steppe whilst visiting rural areas.

There is no monitoring and few penalties for those who are careless with their packages and bottles and although violators of the Specially Protected Areas are officially penalized, this depends on the individual park keeper and his employees. Each soum (local administrative district) has its own environmental protection officer, but unarmed and with few legal powers, they can effectively do little against wanton damage, ranging from open waste disposal to illegal hunting of endangered species. The environment has long been taken for granted and there are gradually signs that vigilance has to be called on.

Mongolian school children receive no environmental training and alternative sources of power have been little explored, although Mongolian companies ABE and the Renewable Energy Institute (REI) manufacture and sell solar panels. REI produces small 30 watt solar panels which can be used in gers to generate electricity and portable TV's or radios.

A legacy of taking the pristine Mongolian environment for granted has led to carelessness and damage to the countryside. There has been little foresight and foreign experts have eventually been drafted into the country to repair damage as Mongolians have on the whole been environmentally negligent

in their cities and on the steppe. The United Nations Development Program Biodiversity Project, which initially started in '93 is hoping to receive funding for its second phase in September. If the Global Environmental Facility comes through with the money, a new project focusing on protected areas in Sukhbaatar, Dornod and eastern Hentii will start in the autumn. United Nations' Volunteers will assist local environmental inspectors with protected area management and public awareness campaigns. This public awareness may be as simple as discouraging people from washing their cars in local rivers, driving directly across the steppe and breaking the traditional bottles of *arkhi*, which all have a limited but consistent impact.

Tov province's Mother Rock is a classic example. This natural, sacred site has been devastated by rubbish piled up against the brick tea walls surrounding the rock icon. A clean up operation has stemmed the flow of bottles, rotting food and paper which gathered around the monument, but a stench still hangs in the air over the rock as the rubbish slowly rots into the ground.

Environmentalists say one of the biggest factors in Mongolia's environmental deterioration is urbanization, with the consequent demands for a

more sophisticated lifestyle and advanced sanitation and employment opportunities.

Mongolians are moving from their pristine rural environments to urban settlements, which are now struggling to cope with the steady human influx. The State Statistical Office claims 90 percent of those moving to Ulaanbaatar are from western provinces, where standards of living have long traditionally been lower than the rest of the country. Approximately 80 percent are from Gobi-Altai province. The residents of this one

western province mainly resettle in Erdenet, Darkhan and Ulaanbaatar. Local residents have cited economics, education, health and employment as their incentives for resettling and the media have joined the voices raised in protest at deteriorating living standards in the provinces. Those who choose to remain in the provinces have to face increased prices for goods transported from the four major cities and collapsing local facilities.

Food is often more expensive in the countryside than the cities—

transportation costs are high and traders make a considerable living from charging over the odds to those who have no choice of where to purchase their flour and rice.

The lure of a potentially more comfortable life tempts people to pack up their nomadic lifestyles and head to the uncertainty of urban life.

Then there is the question of water. In western provinces and especially in Gobi-Altai the quality of water is appalling. Gobi Altai's limited local water supply has a particularly high salt

content.

When Gobi-Altai was first established as a province in 1940 there was no discussion of how to supply the province with water and this has never in fact been resolved. The provincial capital Altai relies on supplies from Eson Bulag well, which doesn't have sufficient water reserves to supply the population. Human numbers have diminished as people have moved eastwards, although the local population is still higher than the original 1940 numbers.

As a result of the water quality, locals claim

they are forced to transport water for up to 40 kilometers from outside Altai. There have been several confirmed reports of people draining their home radiators to extract the water inside. Local doctors say the provincial water carries stomach and liver health risks. Visitors to the province often complain of stomach upsets and diarrhea and the doctors say many deaths have been attributed to liver and stomach complaints and the blame has been laid on the province's poor quality of water.





ECO UPDATE

UNDP heads Dornod biodiversity project

By Montsme Correspondent
B. Purevsuren

The Dornod Mongolian Steppe Project, which focus on sustainable development and protection of animals, will be implemented by the Mongolian Government and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Project contracts have been signed by the Minister of Environment

S. Bayarsogt and UNDP Resident Representative Douglas Gardner.

The World Environment Foundation

will provide the bulk of the financial aid for the seven-year project, contributing US\$4.1 million; UNDP will assist with an additional US\$1 million.

Researchers involved with the programme hope to create a management plan for the area by studying its biodiversity. The project also aims to improve the lives of local people, by providing efficient ways to co-exist with their environment.

The Eastern Mongolian Protected Area contains rare wildlife, minerals, grasslands and rolling plains. It is home to 25 species of mammals, dominated by herds of Mongolian gazelle and birds including the rare white-naped crane.



Tragedy strikes steppe gazelles

By JILL LAWLESS

A deadly infection has wiped out nearly all the gazelles born last year in Mongolia's eastern steppe.

And biologists say the tragedy poses a long-term danger to the population of the fleet-footed animal in Mongolia.

A survey conducted by a team of Mongolian and foreign biologists in November found that between 80 and 90 per cent of gazelle calves born in 1998 are dead as a result of necrotic rot — a form of foot rot caused by unusually heavy rainfall last July and August.

The disease — which causes a gangrene-like infection that prevents the animals walking and feeding — is also blamed for a sharp decline in the number of yearlings surviving through 1998.

And the scientists predict higher-than-average mortality among adult gazelles over the next year.

"The area's long-term average annual rainfall is 73 millimetres," says S. Enkhbold, a biodiversity specialist with the Eastern Steppe Biodiversity Project, a United Nations-backed initiative which is monitoring the gazelle population and trying to find alternative livelihoods for eastern-steppe herders. "Last year there was 120 millimetres."

"We don't know the exact numbers, but the result is that the yearling and young-age class is much lower than other populations in the world, lower than what should be expected."

No one knows exactly how many gazelles roam Mongolia's grasslands. A 1996 study using an aerial count estimated there were 2 million.

Enkhbold says the 1998 tragedy will affect Mongolia's gazelle population for years to come.

"We need to be worried about it, because it's a big thing," he says. "Two age classes have disappeared. The yearlings and young would have reached sexual maturity in three to four years. So in a few years it will have a big effect on the population."

At the request of administrators at the Eastern Mongolia Protected Area — the vast national park that's home to many of the country's gazelles — the Environment Ministry has banned both commercial and household gazelle hunting this season.

While that suggests the government is taking the problem seriously, it's not a universally popular move in the area. Gazelles are an integral part of the local economy in the eastern aimags. Their skins and meat are used by local residents, and also exported to China.

The meat of the animals — considered plentiful and easy to kill — is even used to feed prisoners and border troops in the area.

"People do poach, and that's a problem," says Enkhbold. "Government organizations have a budget to buy livestock for food. But they save money by using gazelles."

"And some big companies that do commercial hunting are not happy."

"The aimag, soums and the Protected Area all have inspectors. But, especially in the soums, the rangers lack petrol or money to get around."

In the meantime, biologists are pinning hope on a number of upcoming gazelle-friendly initiatives, including an international research project and a study of gazelle hunting by Germany's GTZ organization that's aimed at establishing sustainable hunting levels.

They say further monitoring will be needed before they can say whether hunting can be resumed next autumn. And they stress that protecting the gazelle will require an international effort.

"What we're trying to do now is find out what's happening across the border in China and Russia," says Sanna-Kaisa Juvonen, a wildlife biologist with the Biodiversity Project.

"We're going to have a meeting in April of all three countries to talk about conservation issues and what we can do to protect the gazelles in the border region."



A foot infection has killed thousands of gazelles on Mongolia's eastern grasslands.

Mongol Messenger

24-02-99

Results of biological diversity project to be discussed in May

The first year result of the "Eastern Mongolian Biological Diversity" project, being implemented by the Mongolian Ministry for Nature and Environment jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Worldwide Nature and Environment Foundation will be discussed in May, this year.

The project, costing 6.1 million US dollar, will be implemented for seven years, involving vast territory in the country's east-

ern part, including east and south Hentii Aimag province and two other aimags, Dornod and Sukhbaatar.

The project is being implemented with an aim to improve management of Mongolia's strictly protected areas, simultaneously giving support to people, residing the environs, to solve their social problems, as well, to protect biological diversities in the territory and develop the matter on proper use of natural resources.

DISASTER Relief



By D. Narantuya

At the beginning of this decade, the United Nations announced to the world that the 1990's would be the 'International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.' Each year would carry its own theme and slogan. 1998 was branded 'Natural Disaster Prevention and the Media.'

With the slogan "Prevention begins with information," the idea is that journalists can play an active roll in saving lives by educating people through their medium.

This message was discussed on October 14 - the international day for natural disaster reduction. Representatives from Mongolia's United Nations office hosted a round table discussion with media to mark the occasion.

Former Minister of Environment and current advisor to the same ministry Ts. Adiyasuren indicated that Mongolia must stop waiting for disasters to happen and then cleaning up. Rather, it should plan ahead and create disaster prevention programmes. He added that the media can greatly assist with this campaign.

"The media has a tendency to inform the public of an event after it happens," said one representative. Journalists at the meeting admitted that there is intense competition to report on sensational events, but little motivation to inform the public on prevention measures.

The discussion had its share of confrontations. One journalist complained that the Civil De-

fence Office often fails to report pertinent information. "They keep it a secret," said Ts. Shagdarsuren, a reporter from Mongolian Radio.

A Civil Defence Office representative then went on the defensive. "We refuse to give information when there is a cause for national security. For example, the Fall marmot plague could not be publicised until we had detailed and valid information," he said.

Observers note that specialised journalism is developing in Mongolia, including environmental journalism. Yet many are critical that the field is young in Mongolia and poorly developed. For this reason, it has been confirmed that a handbook dedicated to the subject will be released.

Environmentalists have calculated that natural disasters are in-

creasing world-wide, a phenomena which has been influenced significantly by human impact. Despite its remote location and sparsely populated land, even Mongolia has been severely affected by human influenced natural disasters.

Mongolian disasters include drought - the worst recorded years being 1945, 1955 and 1968. More than a million livestock were lost during these three years. In 1993, a drought coupled with heavy snow killed 840,000 head of livestock, a Tg1.4 billion loss.

Fire has also been a hazard in Mongolia, 1065 blazes have been triggered over the past 15 years, destroying 20 percent of forest lands. The Spring fires of 1996 caused Tg32.6 billion in losses.



Mongolia's earthquake plans: are they shaky at best?

By Jill LAWLESS

The January 10 earthquake in northern China, which killed 10 people and left as many as 50,000 homeless, set off aftershocks in Mongolia.

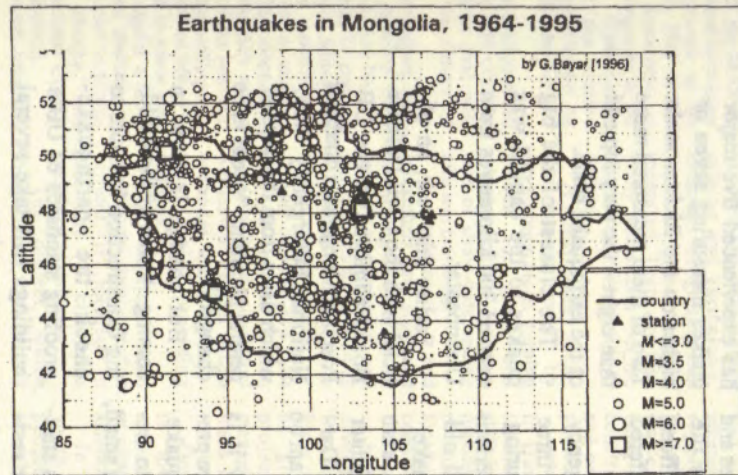
The tremor, whose epicentre was located 180 kilometres northeast of the Inner Mongolian capital of Hohhot, triggered a series of small quakes, measuring two to three on the Richter Scale, that were picked up by seismicological stations in this country.

Alongside the physical ripples, it raises troubling questions for Mongolia, an earthquake-prone country with a shaky physical and administrative infrastructure.

Mongolia has a busy and active earthquake history. In this century, the country has experienced five quakes measuring seven or higher on the Richter Scale. Those rank as large earthquakes – this month's quake in China, by comparison, rated 6.5.

Two of the quakes measured higher than eight – the very top end of the earthquake scale. A quake in the Gov-Altai mountains in 1957 reached 8.2.

"That's very large – the whole world knows about this earthquake," says M. Ulziibat, a research worker with the Ast-



The map shows the frequency and intensity of quakes in Mongolia.

ronomy and Geophysical Centre of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, with something like pride.

The most recent big quake was in 1991, when a tremor measuring 6.5 hit Khovsgol aimag.

Mongolia's sparse and scattered population prevented these major earthquakes from amassing huge death tolls.

"There was not much death or many destroyed buildings, because in Mongolia there are

not so many people," says Ulziibat. "In the 1957 earthquake, only 10 people died."

But if a large quake hit Ulaanbaatar, it would be a different story. Mongolia's capital does not lie in the country's most earthquake-active zone, but it does sit on several faults.

"Normally in Ulaanbaatar we don't have large earthquakes, but we have some small ones," says Ulziibat.

"Although Ulaanbaatar has not had any big earthquakes,

there are some dangerous regions near Ulaanbaatar. In 1967, there was a large earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter Scale 300 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar."

Two major fault lines slice through Mongolia – one in the Gov-Altai mountains in the southwest, the other in the Bulnui mountains in the northwest. These are sparsely populated areas – but they're also remote, which makes disaster relief a potential nightmare.

The Civil Defense Board is the guardian of Mongolia's National Emergency Plan. Officials there are reluctant to give details about the nation's disaster-relief scheme.

"We have a plan of measures which will be taken in the event of an earthquake," says Boldbaatar, a senior trainer at the CDB. "This plan covers the country as a whole, as well as each aimag."

But the plan dates from the days of central planning and centralized authority. "It needs to be changed," admits Boldbaatar.

The United Nations Development Programme's Disaster Management Project is working with the Civil Defense Board on a disaster-management database that will help set the framework for a new disaster-preparedness plan. But the project has yet to produce concrete results.

And what if a major quake does hit Ulaanbaatar? Ulziibat says buildings constructed before 1960 were not built with earthquake-proofing in mind. That means many of the city's best-known landmarks – including Government House, the Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Drama Theatre – could be levelled by a severe quake.

Earthquake-proofing stand-

ards were introduced in 1960, but enforcement fell apart in the early 1990s. So many new buildings are structurally shaky, and unregulated apartment renovation could be harming older residential buildings.

"We need special construction for buildings in Ulaanbaatar," notes Ulziibat. He says enforcement at the moment is, "not so good. If we have a major earthquake, I think there will be many damaged and destroyed buildings."

"Just now we are beginning new work to make an assessment of buildings – are they OK or not OK? The Building Construction Institute has equipment to check whether buildings are OK or not for earthquakes. So we'll see in three or four years."

"We have a detailed account of the damages that will be incurred and how people will be affected by earthquakes for every district of Ulaanbaatar," says Boldbaatar of the capital's civil

defense plan. But when pressed for details, he says the plan is secret. Getting details requires permission from the Ulaanbaatar mayor's office.

Mongolia also needs new earthquake-monitoring equipment. The Astronomy and Geophysical Centre has 16 monitoring stations around the country – but only four of them, installed since 1994 with French aid, give data in real-time. The others take a week to get information back to Ulaanbaatar.

"The Americans are beginning to be able to predict earthquakes using GPS technology to study the movement of faults," notes Ulziibat. "We need research in this area, so we know, if there is an earthquake of 6.5 or 7, how will we protect Ulaanbaatar?"

Still, he confesses excitement at the prospect of a major quake.

"It's my job. I like big earthquakes."



Quake rattles a sleeping UB

Ulaanbaatar residents were shaken from their sleep at 4 am on September 25 when a moderate earthquake struck central Mongolia.

The tremor, centred on the border of Deren and Delgerstogt soums in Dundgov aimag, approximately 250 kilometres south of the capital, measured 5 on the Richter scale.

It was felt in the aimag capital of Mandalgov and across Ulaanbaatar. Minor damage to buildings was reported in Deren and Delgerstogt soum centres and in Mandalgov, where the aimag administration offices, library and a school suffered cracks.

Ulaanbaatar emergency services reported only three calls to ambulances during the quake. In the most serious incident, an already ill old man died during the quake.

Another tremor, also measuring 5 on the Richter scale, struck between Darkhan and Erdenet at 11 am on September 25.

Seismologists say it is unlikely the tremors are precursors to a bigger quake. Mongolia plays host to frequent, albeit frequently small, earthquakes.

But the tremor has started many Ulaanbaatar residents into thinking about the impact of a major quake on Mongolia's capital city.

"It shook our building," said one Sansar resident. "It was scary, I tell you."

"Car horns were going off, dogs were barking," said another apartment-dweller. "I

thought I was going to wake up in a pile of bricks."

Engineers warn that many Ulaanbaatar buildings cannot withstand a severe quake. Buildings constructed before 1960 were not earthquake-proofed, and those built or renovated after 1990 are often not up to standard.

Although Ulaanbaatar does not lie in the most earthquake-prone region of Mongolia, it does sit on several faults. And the country as a whole lies in an active earthquake zone.

In this century, Mongolia has experienced five major quakes measuring seven or higher on the Richter scale. Two of them measured more than eight – the very top end of the earthquake scale.

The closest of the big quakes to the capital was centred 300 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar.

Earlier this year, an official with the Civil Defense Board admitted to the UB Post that Mongolia's outdated National Emergency Plan, which dates from the days of central planning, "needs to be changed."

But change is slow in coming. A plan by the Building Construction Institute to check the earthquake-proofing standards of UB's buildings will take several years to complete.

The United Nations Development Programme's Disaster Management Project aims to work with the CDB on a disaster-management database and a new disaster-preparedness plan. But it is still in the preliminary stages.



MAP-21 programs: setting the standard

By Laura Ryser

Since its creation in May 1996, the Mongolian Action Programme for the 21st Century (MAP-21) has promoted sustainable development in Mongolia. The Capacity 21/United Nations Development Project (UNDP) project is creating a national strategy and has implemented three pilot projects and twenty-one small projects throughout the country.

Sustainable development can be promoted through equal access to jobs, education, and social services. It is also enhanced through a sustainable use of natural resources, while protecting the integrity and stability of the environment.

A draft of the MAP-21 report was issued last August and is expected to be completed by May of this year. The document is Mongolia's response to the 1992 Rio Declaration created by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development.

The report is expected to help leaders and citizens focus on steps that will determine the future of Mongolia.

Under the project, each aimag will develop their own 'Aimag Action Plan.'

The agenda 21 process will also help Mongolia during its economic transition to a market economy. The document will be a reflection of the background of our nomadic people who are settling into a different style of life.

"We need to know how to make Mongolia a more industrialized country, to complement our traditional pastoralistic society," said MAP-21 National Coordinator, Mr Khuldorj.

The document considers



A stitch in time: Residents of Mandalgobi, Dundgobi Aimag, learn to sew through a MAP-21 small project.

Mongolia's strengths in mining and agriculture, although recognising that productivity needs to be increased. There are also many weaknesses that the document will attempt to address.

A costly energy sector can be improved by developing clean burning stoves for gers, and encouraging the construction of straw-bale energy efficient buildings.

Consultants and researchers have suggested developing a petrochemical industry to develop oil and gas reserves to be used as substitutes for expensive foreign energy imports.

One of MAP-21's pilot projects is the Urban Sustainable Agricultural Settlement Project which enhances waste management while providing fertilizer.

The fertilizer and greenhouse demonstration project is located in Gaachurt - 20 kilometers outside of Ulaanbaatar.

The project, which includes two straw-houses

and a greenhouse, is an attempt to improve the water supply which has been polluted by agricultural waste. Local people are being trained in straw-bale construction, composting, and sustainable agriculture practices.

A MAP-21 small project in Dundgobi focuses on training youth in various skills including sewing, shoe making, carpentry, and hair dressing. Products are sold locally to help pay for the costs of teacher salaries and raw materials for training.

MAP-21 has also developed the Aimag Action Development Fund, with loans of up to US\$5,000 to be given for selected projects. Training in managing and repaying the loans will be provided for the chosen participants.

One of MAP-21's goals is to improve public awareness and participation in sustainable development activities.

In the February 5-7 youth eco-forum, young people will be asked to contribute their own ideas

for sustainable development in Mongolia. The forum will also be open to the general public.

The backbone to MAP-21 projects is rural development.

When rural aimags become more self sufficient, pressure will be taken off the capital, which has suffered from an influx of rural people in search of better life. This issue has created intense competition for housing, jobs and social services.

The Mongolian Action Programme for the 21st Century is funded by UNDP and the Capacity 21 initiative.

Laura Ryser graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia in Canada and is in Mongolia on an internship from the Sustainable Development Research Institute. She is working with the UNDP environmental team on the MAP-21 project.



Forest fires: a community response

By A. DELGERMAA

Mongolia's forest cover is shrinking every day. The devastation has crept up on the country. Forest fires are an annual event, and logging is a longstanding tradition.

But the devastating fires of 1996, which scorched 10.5 million hectares of forest and pasture in 16 aimags, woke the country up to the urgent need for a disaster-management plan, and for some way to fix the damage.

In the wake of the 1996 fires, the United Nations Development Programme and the Ministry of Nature and the Environment established a U.S. \$329,000 project to address the economic and ecological cost of the fires.

While the years since 1996 have not been quite so devastating, fires in 1997 and 1998 have damaged 5 million hectares of forest and pasture land.

And unrestrained and often illegal logging continues to shrink Mongolia's forest cover. Forests officially cover 7.5 per cent of Mongolia's territory, though the unofficial figure is around 12 per cent. That compares to 66.2 per cent for Japan, 65.1 per cent for South Korea, 44.9 per cent for Russia, 30 per cent for Germany and 13.6 per

cent for China. Yet Mongolia exports wood to all these countries.

In addition to working out a disaster-management scheme to reduce the damage caused by natural disasters – in part by setting up an information network at the Civil Defence Department to provide quick access to information – the UNDP project targets community-based reforestation.

Community forestry is new to Mongolia, but has proved highly effective in Southeast Asia. It's aimed at increasing public participation in preventing fires and protecting the forest.

In 1997, the pilot community reforestation project covered 147 hectares of forest in Arkhangai aimag and 124 hectares in Selenge aimag – a start, but still a drop in the bucket.

Four groups consisting of up to 22 families in Arkhangai and Selenge aimags have been authorised to run forest-related business, such as picking berries, tax-free in return for carrying out environmental protection and fire-prevention measures and reforestation.

The problem is that land is not privately owned in Mongolia – so most people feel they have a right to use the forest as they like.

"In other countries, land is owned by people," notes project consultant Arnold Ahlback. "In Mongolia they are allowed to use the land. But that is nearly an ownership."

He is enthusiastic about the future of community forestry, but underlines the importance of proper guidance and financing to lay the foundation.

The project's term finishes at the end of this year. "But the draft programme of national disaster reduction would guide future activity in the field," emphasises J. Batbayar, the project's national co-ordinator.

UB Post

20-10-98

Awards salute green projects

A garbage-recycling scheme in a ger district of Ulaanbaatar, an air-pollution project and an awareness-raising campaign targeted at herders were among the winners at the first Environmental Public Awareness awards.

The October 16 awards capped the two-year Environmental Public Awareness Programme.

Funded by the Dutch government, the United Nations Development Programme and the Australian Embassy in Beijing, the Programme supported, through training and small grants, 91 small projects designed to raise awareness of the country's fragile ecology.

The projects were carried out by Mongolian NGOs and government agencies in Ulaanbaatar and all 21 aimags.

The 22 projects saluted for their accomplishments on Friday ranged from a video demonstrating how to plant a tree to a campaign to erect road signs in dusty Dalanzadgad and a televised ecology Olympiad.

At the awards ceremony, it was announced that the project will be extended for another two years.

The ceremony also marked the launch of the news published Green Book, a how-to manual on environmental protection in Mongolia.

UB Post

30-09-97

A tree grows in UB

Every Mongolian should plant a tree a year, says The Mongolian Forestry Association's Ts. Banzragch. A newly adopted forestry law encourages local authorities to organize citizen tree-planting, and Banzragch's group has completed a film, *How to Plant A Tree*, to educate people on tree-planting techniques.

It's one of more than 60 NGO- and government-initiated Environmental Public Awareness projects supported by money from

Australia, the Netherlands and the United Nations Development Programme.

The wide-ranging projects, outlined at a September 23 press conference at the Press Institute of Mongolia, include the Selbe River protection project, plant and animal research at Otgon Tenger protected area, the Blue Bag recycling scheme, an initiative to fight air pollution in Ulaanbaatar and a project dubbed Gobi Nature Through Children's Eyes.

Warm and ecofriendly: why straw houses have development agencies excited

By David SADOWAY

A woman stands poised on a ladder, plastering a wall with earth-red mud. An adjacent room, soon to be filled with doctors and nurses, is covered with baled yellow straw. Wheat straw, mud and glue — these are the main materials in a straw-bale building.

"Straw-bale construction technology was introduced to Mongolia in 1995 by A.D.R.A., the Adventist Development Relief Agency," says N. Tsend, the officer overseeing this project. "This technology has become so popular that 16 projects are now under construction or on the drafting table."

Recently the U.N.-funded Mongolian Action Programme for the 21st Century decided to marry this energy-efficient building technique to social-service pilot projects. The twofold aim is to teach employable skills in construction while creating much needed community services including a school, a kindergarten, a dormitory and a health clinic.

One of the straw-bale projects is a community health clinic in Biocombinat, a 4,000-person bedroom community just west of Ulaanbaatar's Buyant-Ukhaa airport. When the work is complete by year's end, the clinic will have check-up rooms, visiting areas, offices and storage spaces. Tsend explains that the total cost for the 160-square-metre building will be around Tg 12 million, or U.S. \$14,000.

Though it is only partially finished, the clinic is pleasantly warm. An efficient Chinese-built heater recirculates warm water to radiators throughout the building.

"This building requires 20-30 kilograms of coal daily — four to five times less fuel than conventional brick buildings of the same size," says Tsend. "It means the fire only needs to be made twice a day." That means less work, and a lot fewer carbon and sulphur oxides and harmful interior smoke.

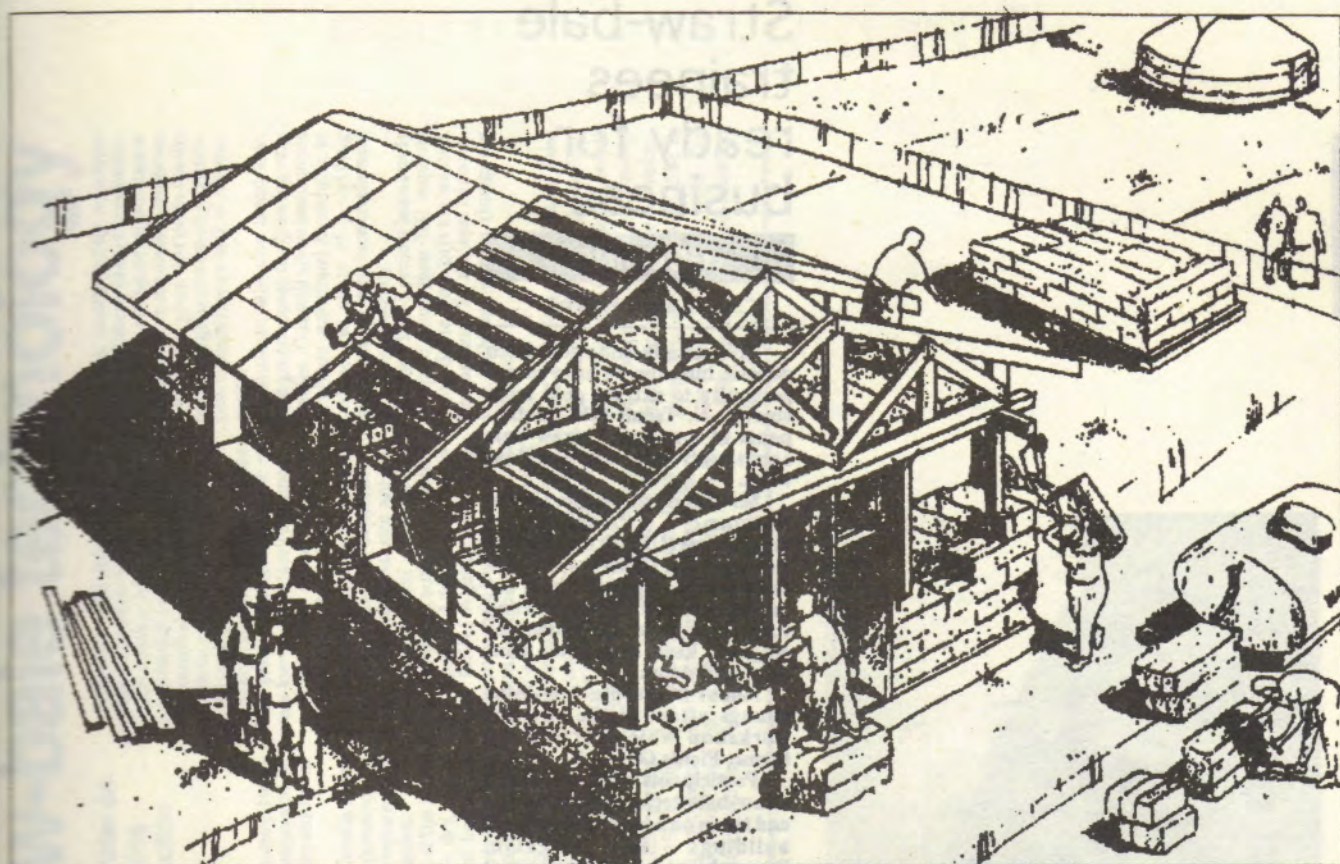
Another benefit of building with straw is the environmentally friendly nature of the materials. Natural wheat straw, clay and sand are non-toxic, cheap and plentiful in Mongolia. Straw-bale construction costs roughly half the price per square metre of brick. The dry Mongolian climate means that the materials do not rot easily, and straw is an excellent insulator.

"With proper construction and maintenance, a straw-bale house will last up to 80 years," Tsend claims.

At the Biocombinat clinic 27 trainees, many of them women, are going through three weeks of intensive training. Travel from their home aimags and training allowances are provided by the Mongolian Action Programme's pilot-project fund. After written and oral tests, students receive certification as teachers, technicians or workers.

The project is providing training for six-person crews from three aimags.

(See next page)



Cheap and energy efficient: there's been a lot of huff and puff about straw-bale houses lately.

Crew members include a certified engineer and technician, two carpenters, a plasterer and a metal worker.

The clinic uses a standard concrete foundation and floor, the later built atop a straw-gravel bed. The walls and roof are also insulated with straw. The thick walls are mudded at least twice before receiving a coat of paint.

Construction began in August on another straw bale-pilot project at Amgalan, in Ulaanbaatar's east end. Work was completed by 30 worker-trainees. This two-storey, 168-square-metre structure was built at cost of U.S. \$18,000.

The building at Amgalan is nearly finished. Soon the keys will be handed over to the Mongolian Federation

of Women. The Federation intends to start a Women's Development Centre, providing free healthcare services, skills training and a temporary shelter for battered women.

The plan is to surround the building with gardens for food and traditional medicinal herbs.

Back at the clinic, Oyunchimeg is busy discussing building techniques with carpenters and plasterers. For the last two months, she has been learning to teach straw-bale construction techniques.

"I became interested in this technique after watching a television programme on this type of housing," she says. "I wanted to learn about it by taking the three week teacher-training course."

Now Oyunchimeg plans to return home to Sukhbaatar aimag in eastern Mongolia and "look for possibilities of private housing construction in the countryside." She believes demand will be high and through her company's efforts she intends to build two or three houses.

Tsend, too, has high hopes for the future of straw-bale construction. In 1998, with the co-operation of A.D.R.A., 10 projects will be completed in nine aimags. And Tsend is working with the Asian Development Bank and the private sector to get more than 70 more projects off the ground into the next century. Many of these projects will feature solar hot-air collection and basic greenhouse technology.

Many will also provide much-needed employment.

Would a straw bale house be a cheaper choice than the classic ger? A basic ger costs between Tg 750,000 and Tg 1 million, while a similar sized straw-bale structure would be valued at around Tg 2 million. But the long-term advantages of energy savings and extra rooms might make the straw-bale a more appealing choice to some, especially to young families.

It will probably be a long time before Mongolians give up their traditional mobile form of housing. In the meantime, for those building with wood and brick, an energy efficient alternative is being demonstrated in Ulaanbaatar and five aimags.



Straw-bale trainees ready for business

HOUSING

by Laura Ryser

"We usually mine gold from deposit, but now we have an opportunity to extract gold from straw," N. Tsend told participants at a national straw-bale construction workshop last week.

Mr Tsend, who is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Sustainable Development Officer, said various local companies had expressed interest in constructing straw-bale buildings while others were keen to provide windows and doors.

About 85 people from nine aimags attended the one-day workshop which carried the theme, Fields Of Gold.

Participants were issued with straw-bale technology manuals and taken on a tour of straw-bale buildings in Amgalan, Biocombinat and Microdistrict 3.

The workshop was an important part of the Provision of Energy Efficient Social Services Project, which has already received requests from the State and private sector for straw-bale buildings in their local communities.

The project has coordinated the construction of straw-bale buildings for a health clinic and a centre for the Mongolian Women's Federation. Over the next two years, the project plans the construction of a further 98 super-insulated buildings. Only companies with experience in straw-bale building will be eligible to bid for these contracts.

National Project Manager S. Ganbold, who has worked closely with 163 Mongolians who have been exposed to on-the-job training, said many trainees were interested in exploring employment opportunities in straw-bale construction.

"Enkhbayar is a mother of two who received training and is working at the Amgalan site where the two-storey building is being constructed for the Mongolian Women's Federation," Mr Ganbold said.

"Next season she plans to start up her own business and take a straw-bale construction crew to her native Dornogobi Aimag."

The workshop was organised by MAP-21, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and the UNDP.

Keen interest in straw-bale technology

HOUSING

Each winter heating costs for a Mongolian ger can reach Tg4200 per square metre, while heating a small straw-bale dwelling will cost only Tg280.

Such a house can be built for about Tg560,000, enabling fuel savings to pay for its construction within seven years.

Mongolians living in straw-bale houses can decrease their fuel use by more than 90 per cent, resulting in a cleaner and healthier environment.

In addition to solving problems related to economic and energy efficiency, the United Nations Development Programme and the Government of Mongolia hope that the Provision of Energy Efficiency Social Services (PEESS) project will solve some of Mongolia's

■ Mongolia is gearing up for a national seminar on straw-bale houses to demonstrate building technologies to State and private construction companies. LAURA RYSER reports.

infrastructure and social problems.

Currently, instead of delivering educational and health services with their operating budgets, institutes are instead consuming resources to heat outdated buildings.

Building straw-bale public facilities will allow the social services infrastructure to be less dependent on nonrenewable resources for its energy needs. This will free financial resources for core activities and give a significant contribution to the conservation of the environment.

Straw-bale building techniques have been used in North America

since the turn of the century. However many people continue to be skeptical about the durability of straw-bale houses.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the straw-bale/mortar structure wall has proven to be fire-resistant.

Straw will not rot if the straw used to make bales is dry, and a well-constructed roof keeps the water off. This will prevent water from accumulating or becoming trapped inside the wall.

Since straw-bale walls are strongly compacted and plastered, they also provide fewer havens for pests than conventional wooden walls.

The three-year PEESS project began on May 20, 1997. The project involves the participation of the UNDP, the Mongolian Government, MAP-21, NGOs and individuals.

More than 160 people from 18 aimags have been exposed to on-the-job training of which 32 have been awarded a teacher certificate. Only certified teacher-level trainees can be construction managers on the project.

Sixty percent of the trainees were previously unemployed or were low-income family women.

A two-story straw-bale house for the Mongolian Women's Federation site in Amgalan and straw-bale health clinic for Ulaanbaatar on the Bio-Combinat site are being built by local construction firms (trainees) with the technical assistance of Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). Other straw-bale buildings are being constructed in rural areas where social services and living standards are underdeveloped.

A unique feature of the PEESS project is the advanced technology of about 80 photovoltaic systems - solar panels that collect electricity - and the installation of 75 solar hot-air collectors in social service buildings. Photovoltaic systems do not emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The project will design energy-

efficient, south-facing windows that will either be sealed or double-pane. This will be an improvement from poorly built double windows with single glass that often results in broken glass or non-aligned window frames from a lack of maintenance.

Trainees will also install low-cost greenhouses for growing vegetables. This will allow institutions to obtain nutritional foodstuffs, to reduce the costs of providing meals, and to introduce an element of self-sufficiency.

The PEESS project has already received more than 100 requests from State and private sector. Preparations for the next 10 straw-bale buildings in nine aimags are underway.

Laura Ryser graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia in Canada and is in Mongolia on an internship from the Sustainable Development Research Institute. She is currently working with the UNDP environmental team on the MAP-21 project.





Pumphouse serves rural community

By Laura Ryser

Mongolia's first straw-bale pumphouse was put into operation recently.

Located 50 kilometres south of Ulaanbaatar near Zunmod Soum, the pumphouse will be used by 500 of the area's 2000 people.

Prior to the pumphouse, water had been delivered by truck, a costly operation. Water will now be more accessible and cheaper - residents will save Tg150 per 1,000 litres of water.

Puntsogdorj and Nyamjav are two local residents now benefiting from the hand pump. In the past, the couple had to walk 300 metres to a different pump: a difficult task when carrying heavy loads of water in sub-zero temperatures.

A caretaker will monitor the

facilities. His salary will be paid by the fees collected from the pumphouse. To reduce ground water pollution, the house is located upstream from the local settlement.

The pumphouse is the first straw-bale structure built in winter. As a result the exterior plastering of the building will be completed in Spring.

The building was created as part of the National Water Sanitation and Hygiene Education Programme for the 21st Century. It was made with support from UNDP, Australia, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The project will help 50 communities in six aimags with water, sanitation and health education over the next three years. 150 pumps are expected to be installed.

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10-11-98

Straw-bale clinic goes up in smoke

Fire has destroyed a straw-bale health clinic built under a much-praised United Nations Development Programme project.

No one was hurt in the November 4 blaze, which started in the attic of the structure in the Ulaanbaatar district of Bagakhangai. Ulaanbaatar Fire Department investigators are working to determine the cause of the fire, which smouldered for 18 hours before it was extinguished by firefighters.

Though large portions of the clinic's walls remained standing after the fire, area residents soon began dismantling what was left of the structure.

Straw-bale construction has been taken up enthusiastically by development groups as cheap, energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

But a spate of fires earlier this year that culminated in a Fire Department warning raised concerns about the buildings' safety.

Advocates said at the time

the problem lay in shoddy materials and construction methods at unregulated sites, not with the technology itself.

The Bagakhangai clinic, built with Canadian government funding, is one of six social-services buildings constructed in 1998 under the UNDP project.

Its construction was monitored by the Adventist Development Relief Agency - the well-regarded pioneer of straw-bale construction in Mongolia - and the building had been given high marks for quality and safety.

UNDP programme officer Paul Groenewegen stands by straw-bale construction.

He says the Bagakhangai authorities have already requested a straw-bale replacement clinic.

"I think this is an isolated incident," he says. "We'll have to learn the lessons and build buildings even more fire-safe in the future."

Second Red Book makes its debut

ENVIRONMENT

by B. Indra

Mongolian Environment Minister Ts. Adiyasuren presented British Ambassador to Mongolia, John Durham, with a special edition of the recently-published Red Book last week.

Mr Adiyasuren said the updated Red Book was the fruit of joint British-Mongolia cooperation to protect Mongolia's nature and environment.

The British Government contributed more than \$US16,000 to the Red Book project.

"The Red Book is now printed in English and Mongolian language and has met international publishing and scientific standards," the minister said.

In the first edition of the Red Book, published in Mongolia in 1987, 50 species of animals and 86 plants were registered.

Mr Adiyasuren said this year a third of the country's total pasture area (117 million hectares) and 40 million hectares of forest had been damaged by insects and rodents.

"The number of rare and threatened species is increasing and several species are in danger of extinction," he said.

"The government has been taking measures to protect and restore Mongolia's biological resources.

"One quarter of the total forest

cover has been damaged by logging, fires, and insect infestation over the last 50 years.

"Biological resources have been depleted and irreparable damage has been done to the environment.

"Mongolian scientists and researchers have given much time to the development of this second edition.

"This book is presented to our readers in order to develop national policies on conservation, sustainable use and the restoration of biological resources, to initiate public awareness programmes on rare and threatened species and implement conservation measures."

Red Book Chief Editor Dr Ts. Shiirevdamba said that the book had been edited in Mongolian and English to aid the implementation of national laws and international conventions, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

"Latest research indicates that the number of species which are in danger of extinction is growing - this is due to increasing aridity and intensive natural resource use in the last decades.

"The country's transition to a free market economy has increased the use of natural resources caus-



British Ambassador to Mongolia John Durham was happy to receive his copy of the Red Book from Environment Minister Ts. Adiyasuren last week.

ing habitat degradation.

"Therefore, it was decided to update the first Mongolian Red Book in order to use it as a conservation tool.

"Research materials were gathered from the Botanical Institute of Biology and Applied Biology, the Mongolian State University, the State Pedagogical University and foreign scientists.

"This book will play an important role in outlining protection

measures based upon scientific principles.

"Mongolian researchers and scientists gave their time and expertise in the development of this second edition of the Mongolian Red Book.

"The broad scope of this book may give rise to discrepancies and disagreements and the editorial board welcomes comments on the issue, content and format of the book."

Money for the printing of the Red Book came from British Government and the Mongolian Environmental Protection Fund (\$US6500) and the Endangered Species Conservation Fund (\$US4500). Preparation of the book for printing, translation and technical work was carried out by the Mongolia Biodiversity Project, funded by the UNDP and the Global Environment Facility.

New Tov cheese factory set to open

AGRICULTURE

by Laura Ryser

Another dairy is expected to open in Tov Aimag this month, allowing herders to keep up with the growing demand for dairy products such as cheese, yoghurt, quark and creams.

The first cheese factory in Altanbulag, a soum centre about 40km from Ulaanbaatar, began production in February 1996 with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and \$US200,000 from the Dutch Government.

Run by the small private company, Byaslag (Cheese),

the factory now employs five people and collects milk from 33 families. Between June and August last year, 36,300 litres of milk valued at Tg3,025,435 was bought by the factory, producing 3.9 tonnes of gouda style cheese.

The second factory will be located in Atar Soum, some 100km from Ulaanbaatar and about 150 km from Altanbulag.

The Cheese Production Project evolved after the Mongolian Parliament declared 60,000ha in the Hustain Nuruu mountain and steppe area, a State Nature Reserve in 1994, to allow the successful reintroduction of the wild Takhi (Przewalski) horse.

Twenty years ago the Takhi almost ceased to exist in Mongolia.

In 1980, a Dutch initiative was launched to establish semi-reserves for the breed and by 1991 Hustain Nuruu was chosen as a suitable location for the release of the zoo-bred animals into the semi-wild.

The first horses were released in July 1994, as part of the reintroduction and steppe ecology programme. The decision was popular among the herders as it represented the return of a well-known icon of Mongolian culture.

According to UNDP programme officer, S. Enkhtuya, grazing and hunting were outlawed in the re-

serve, although herders would be permitted to use the land for grazing as a result of extreme climatic conditions.

With the reduction of their grazing rights, herders faced serious problems concerning the new economic order, and the curtailment of restrictions on animal ownership. They had an abundance of milk but limited opportunity to market the surplus.

The Cheese Production Project created new income for herders as compensation

for the lost opportunities evolving from the protection measures taken by the Hustain Nuruu Steppe Project. The project has particularly benefited the women in their role as the main milkers in the family. Project consultant S. Tsetgee said quality inspections were done at the cheese factory every three months.

All dairy staff and eligible herders are trained in relevant aspects of cheese production, including hygiene, pricing and improved livestock management.

And herders are provided with moulds and other necessary equipment that allow them to standardize the steppe cheese.

■ *Laura Ryser graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia in Canada and is in Mongolia on an internship from the Sustainable Development Research Institute. She is currently working with the UNDP environmental team on the MAP-31 project.*



Mrs Oostra, the wife of the Dutch Ambassador to Mongolia, accepts some gouda-style cheese from factory worker D. Dolgor.



Few greenhouse gases but temperature still on the rise

ENVIRONMENT

In an effort to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases, more than 1500 delegates from over 160 nations convened in Kyoto, Japan for a 10-day treaty negotiation.

Mongolian Environmental Minister Ts. Adiyasuren returned from the conference last week to announce the results of the Kyoto Climate Change conference this month.

The negotiations resulted in a legally binding protocol stating

that industrialised nations will reduce their collective emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2 percent. Overall emissions from a group of six greenhouse gases will be lowered by 2008-2012. By that time, emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide must be equal to those of 1990. Cuts in hydrofluoride will be measured against emissions in either a 1990 or 1995.

"Too much development has had a bad influence for our natural environment, our style of development needs to be changed. History has taught us that if we don't

change our development style, our environment will gradually sour," said UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Bruno Pouzat.

Although Mongolia releases very few greenhouse gases in relation to more developed countries, local effects will still be felt.

Research shows that the greenhouse effect has contributed to the 0.7 degree rise in temperature, which has occurred over the past 50 years. This has resulted in desertification, the loss of valuable steppe to desert. Desertification has caused a decrease in water supply, harvest and livestock.

Gobi faces desertification threat

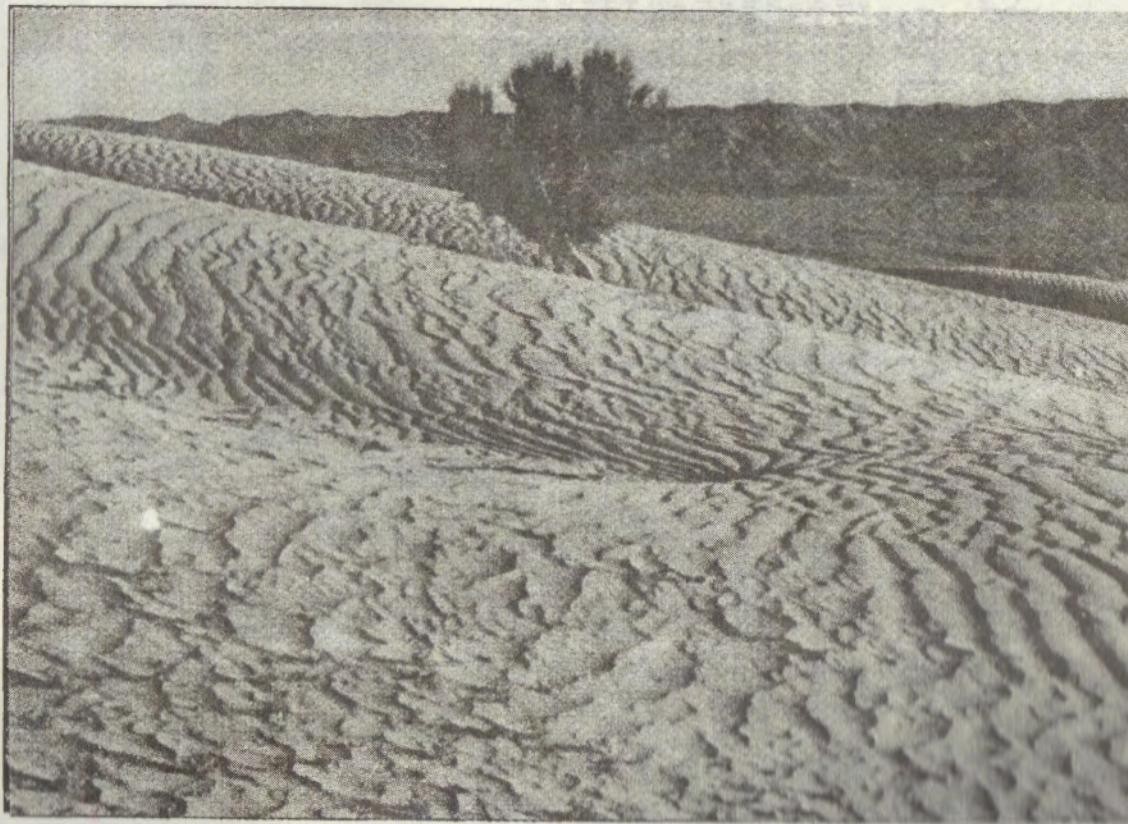
Scientists have marked Mongolia as a country in threat of massive desertification. The outlying areas of the Gobi Desert are included in the desertification region, indicated Dr. C Davaadorj of the Geo-ecology Institute.

Mr Davaadorj recently attended a seminar on 'Combating Desertification by Agro-biology Methods.' 20 countries took part in the United Nations seminar, which was held in Israel.

Due to an increase in cars and population, the desert's natural balance has been lost, particularly around the Zamyn Und border area near China. In this region, locals have reported that sand is replacing grazing lands.

One problem has been the recent boom in livestock population. High numbers of livestock have overgrazed many desert areas, causing desert expansion. Research is currently taking place to determine how many animals the Gobi region can accommodate.

Mr Davaadorj noted that he has recently acquired the seeds of 20 plants which are known to be well suited for desertified soil. Experiments will take place to determine if the seeds should be planted.



Sections of the Gobi near China are already feeling the affects of desertification.



Gobi surrenders to small agricultural oasis

by Laura Ryser

The efforts of former veterinarian, D. Baraduuz, extend far beyond the tree-lined boundaries of his one hectare plantation.

For the last five years, Mr Baraduuz has been trying to combat desertification in his native Omnogobi Aimag and he remains committed to educating others while improving the state of the environment.

By visiting different plantations and agricultural works, Mr Baraduuz learned various planting techniques. Before launching his full-time farming career, he was chairman of the Omnogobi Agricultural Department.

Concerns that many medicinal herbs and plants were disappearing from the Gobi region, prompted Mr Baraduuz to begin plantings about five years ago at a site about 60km north of Dalanzadgad.

P. Tseltsee, Project Administrative Officer of MAP-21, the UNDP-funded environmental project which has been supporting Mr Baraduuz's efforts, recalls: "At first his family was skeptical so he worked alone for a year before his wife conceded to help him - when they finally harvested their first crop their thoughts became more positive."

Last August MAP-21 provided Tg3 million for Mr Baraduuz's plantation project, allowing him to test new seeds for the Gobi area. The funds will also enable Mr Baraduuz to develop and produce seeds and trees for other Gobi residents.

In the beginning, the family brought in 80 truckloads of animal fertiliser for use on the plantation. During those early days Mr Baraduuz also built a family home

from handmade bricks. He installed two underground storage facilities with a combined capacity of 10 tonnes - one for potatoes and the other for cabbages.

These days between April and October (depending on the season), he produces medicinal seeds, plants and herbs for local animal fodder, as well as turnips, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, watermelon and two types of cucumber.

The plantation also processed vegetables in jars and in the future has plans to establish a small canning factory.

Mr Baraduuz sells his produce locally, although he is currently looking for an extended market for medicinal herbs including jasmine and the pagoda tree.

Part of the project site is dedicated to producing trees such as Shar Khoshoon, a species which helps reduce salt content in the soil.

After just one year, this plant reduced the salt content enough to plant other types of trees such as aspen, almond, elm, willow and sea buckthorn.

According to Mr Baraduuz, he planted about 5000 of almond trees to protect the area from erosion and sand. About 1000 of these were planted last Spring.

Mr Baraduuz is looking for a market for his trees and discussions are already underway with MAP-21 about the possibility of buying elms next Spring for a desertification project in Zamyn Uud Soum.

Previously the project assumed seeds would have to come from China, but now Mr Baraduuz may be given the opportunity to provide seeds and seedlings.

But Mr Baraduuz's project is not free of problems. The fact that he does not own a vehicle limits Mr Baraduuz's ability to communicate his findings with other people, and he must rent a vehicle



MAP-21 representatives inspected D. Baraduuz's Omnogobi plantation last month.

to transport goods and fertiliser.

Out of 17 willow trees planted in Spring, only 12 have survived their arid surroundings. The deep cracks in the soil around trees is a stark reminder that water scarcity, salt intrusion and soil condition continue to present barriers to local farmers.

Mr Baraduuz realises that one spring would only sustain one hectare of cropland. And while there is not enough water to expand his project, he believes that the aimag's 300 natural springs have the capacity to irrigate 300ha of trees and vegetables.

He said such a scheme would combat desertification and provide jobs for about 300 families, although the extent of competition for these water resources and the capacity of the springs remains unclear.

However Mr Baraduuz's hard work and increased yields have helped to eliminate the myths about the inability of the Gobi to sustain crops.

During last month's Poverty Eradication Week, Mr Baraduuz organised an educational seminar in Dalanzadgad and on-site farm tour a bid to help others understand agricultural economics.

He is currently writing a brochure about his difficulties, success and findings over the last five years.

In the future Mr Baraduuz plans to expand his operation by planting trees and plants on Gurvan Saikhan (Three Beauties) Mountain.

Laura Ryser graduated from the University of Northern British Columbia in Canada and is in Mongolia on an internship from the Sustainable Development Research Institute. She is currently working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) environmental team on the MAP-21 project.





Warmer winters, cooler summers: global warming comes to Mongolia

By Ts. ENKH

Mongolia's climate is world famous for its extremes. But that may be changing. Recent evidence shows the country's temperatures are moderating as a result of global warming.

"There is a worldwide tendency toward global warming, and this warming can be noticed in high-altitude zones, including Mongolia," says Dr. L. Natsagdorj, director of the Institute of Hydrology and Meteorology in Ulaanbaatar.

"Our country's average temperature has risen 0.7 degrees in the last 60 years. The average winter temperature has increased two to three degrees, depending on the region, while summers have become a little bit cooler.

"Over the last 30 years the number of cold days under -25 degrees has fallen by 10 to 15 days and the number of warm days over 25 degrees has also fallen, by 10 to 20 days. The winters are getting warmer and the summers cooler. The huge gap between the highs and lows is shrinking."

In case you think a warmer winter doesn't sound like such a bad thing, Natsagdorj warns of the dire effects of long-term climate change on Mongolia.

"According to international scientists, Mongolia's average monthly temperature will rise between three and 10 degrees in the 2030-2060 period. Summer precipitation will increase, but so will spring droughts. That will have a negative influence on pasture land and livestock breeding.

"Global warming will also mean a two to 15 per cent increase in desert areas and a shrinking of mountain steppe, taiga and tundra zones."

Most scientists agree that global warming is caused by an accumulation of gases in the atmosphere, the so-called "greenhouse effect."

"We can see our planet as a huge greenhouse," explains Natsagdorj. "Direct sunrays penetrate the walls of a greenhouse, becoming heat. They are not able to rebound back completely, causing additional heat. In the same way, the sun's rays penetrate the Earth's atmosphere and are reflected off the Earth's surface. A portion rebounds back and a portion becomes heat, absorbed by the soil.

"By the laws of physics, any heated object creates long-wave rays. These heat rays are absorbed by gases — carbon monoxide, methane, nitrogen and so on — and some are released into the atmosphere, causing additional heat in the Earth's atmosphere.

"In the past 100 years, because of human activity, the level of these greenhouse gases has risen dramatically. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1800, there was 30 per cent less carbon monoxide in the air than there is now, and half as much marsh gases.

"It is important to reduce the level of greenhouse gas emissions immediately, because gases, depending on their type, are stored in the atmosphere for between 50 and 200 years. If we don't take any measures, by 2030-2060 greenhouse gases will have doubled from the 90s' level.

"This will cause a global temperature increase of two degrees, four degrees by the year 2100. The ice in Greenland and the oceans will melt. The ocean level will rise by around 65 centimetres."

Mongolians should feel chilled by this news. But, despite being inhabitants of a vast and sparsely populated country, they should feel free of responsibility. Mongolia has one of the world's highest per-capita rates of carbon dioxide emission — higher even than the United States.

The main culprits are cars, power plants and thousands of ger stoves. But what can Mongolia, a poor developing country, do to curb the pollution? Other developing Asian countries, like China, hardly provide shining models.

Still, some moves are afoot. A project is underway, with British assistance, to mass produce an energy-efficient ger stove.

And the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change commits developed countries — producers of most of the world's greenhouse gases — to aid developing ones.

The World Bank, which recently opened an office in Ulaanbaatar, has established a unit geared to promoting energy efficiency in Asian countries.

Will it be enough? Time will tell.

Mongolia faces burning issues in wake of landmark Kyoto climate-change conference

By David SADOWAY

At the start of December, delegations from around the world met in Kyoto, Japan, for a gathering the BBC dubbed, "the most important conference of the decade." Officially known as the UN Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto congress drew representatives of government and environmental groups, as well as lobbyists from both the traditional and alternative energy industries.

The conference met to grapple with the issue of greenhouse gases, blamed by scientists for contributing to the worldwide atmospheric temperature increase known as global warming.

Ten days of arduous negotiations arrived at three formal proposals that prescribe phased reductions in the amount of greenhouse gases well into the next century — proposals detractors say were fatally watered down to appease the United States and other gaseous nations.

The conference was a sobering experience for the Mongolian delegation led by Environment Minister Ts. Adyasuren.

One troubling problem for Mongolia is the impact of regional greenhouse gases from its populous industrializing neighbours: China, the Koreans and South and Southeast Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Indonesia.

But the problem is not just across the border. This

sparsely populated country has one of the world's highest per capita emission rates of carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas (see table).

The major causes of greenhouse gases are industry — particularly the thermal energy industry — and automobiles. In Mongolia, one can add the stoves from thousands of gers.

The Mongolian government says it is taking the problem seriously.

"Most effects of global climate change are negative for Mongolia," says Adyasuren. "As stated in the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, arid and semi-arid Asia could face exacerbated water scarcity." One Mongolian scientist has projected a dramatic shift northwards in the zone of desertification if Asian greenhouse gases are not stabilized.

Mongolia's present economic woes could be worsened with climate change, notes Adyasuren.

"Preliminary findings show that agriculture, especially livestock and water resources, are the most vulnerable sectors to climate change in Mongolia. These sectors are the major economic sectors of the country."

But is it possible to take a greener, energy-efficient approach to the development that is so urgently needed in Mongolia? A partial solution could lie with new ecologically friendly energy technologies, construction techniques and renovation approaches.

Mongolia's represen-

tatives to Kyoto were made aware of a range of eco-friendly energy technologies, including automobile fuel cells, solar photovoltaics, wind turbines, bio-gas/methane and small-scale hydroelectric production. Innovative green technologies and infrastructure would not only reduce greenhouse gases but reduce air pollution and ecosystem damage.

According to the World Watch and Rocky Mountain Institutes, green technologies can improve industrial competitiveness and create long-run cost savings. They have proven effective in wealthy nations such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany and are increasingly being seen as a solution for economies in transition such as Mongolia.

But where will the money come from?

Ironically, one financial hope for the green shift is the World Bank, which plans to open an office in Ulaanbaatar this year. In the past this major financier was known for funding wasteful energy mega-projects which have sparked popular protests in many nations. Recently, however, the bank appears to have recognized the importance of eco-friendly approaches by launching an Asia Alternative energy unit. This forward-thinking unit has a mandate "to help client countries and Bank operations staff pursue energy efficiency investments in Asia, where two-thirds of the world's new power capacity will be installed in the next decade."

Mongolia's delegation also heard how demand-

management approaches have provided substantial energy savings and employment creation through renovating housing and offices, improving insulation, installing compact fluorescent lighting and using passive solar approaches. One example of energy efficient construction currently being demonstrated in Mongolia is the super-insulated, non-toxic straw-bale building technology demonstrated by several development organizations and now being adopted by the private sector.

The Mongolian government has agreed to develop a strong made-in-Mongolia protocol to reduce greenhouse gases and fulfill the Kyoto agreement.

"We have to understand that any delay of action now will only make the problems worse, and make future solutions more difficult," says Adyasuren. "We should not leave today's problems for our children and grandchildren."



The Land of the Blue Sky is too often the land of smog.

GREENHOUSE GAS FACTS : CO₂ EMISSIONS PER CAPITA (tonnes, 1994)



MONGOLIA	6.50
USA	5.32
AUSTRALIA	4.25
CANADA	4.18
N. KOREA	3.03
RUSSIAN FED	2.99
GERMANY	2.70
U.K.	2.56
JAPAN	2.43
POLAND	2.41
CHINA	0.70
INDIA	0.26



Sources: Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Mongolian Institute of Meteorology



New tax law designed to end timber exports

By B. Indra

Customs tax laws are set to change, and perhaps the most influential will be a tax on timber. The Ministry of Nature and Environment is hoping to implement the tax which could have a lasting affect on Mongolian forest lands.

A January 15 tax will see a Tg150,000 fee weighed on every one cubic metre of wood. The ministry says the tax will preserve forests and revive national industries, while still allowing for domestic needs. The tax is designed to make exporting wood all but impossible.

See **TREE**, page 5

TREE, from page 4

MP D. Enkhtaivan tried to take the forest protection one step further by submitting a law draft to the government which would prohibit the export of wood from Mongolia. Enkhtaivan had been working on the project since 1996, but saw his proposal shot down by Parliament. However, the new tax effectively does what Enkhtaivan set out to do.

The General Customs office reports that in 1998, 232,006.3 cubic metres of sliced wood were exported from Mongolia. The breakdown includes 207.8 cubic metre to Switzerland, 231,361.2 cubic metres to China, 130.2 cubic metres to Korea and 4.5 to Zimbabwe. 278.3 cubic metres of log were exported in all.

108 train cars of cut wood had been prepared for export and customs since January 9, 42 have been exported. Until now, no legal acts or customs tax has inhibited the export of wood.

"The free export of wood was hurting national industries, the price of wood products increased, and the supply of wood fuel decreased. Most importantly, the environment was suffering. The clear cutting in the Mongonmorit and Terelj areas had an obvious affect on the Tuul River, which dropped in height," said Enkhtaivan.

Researchers note that most of

the exported wood is pine, despite the fact that only four percent of Mongolian forest is pine. Just 8.1 percent of Mongolia is covered in forest. This has prompted the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations to call Mongolia's forest reserves 'poor.'

Mongolia has exported 60,000 cubic metres of log and 360,000 sliced wood materials without any customs tax since 1993, at prices three times lower than the world standard. Meanwhile, little has been done domestically to improve the investment and technical renovation of Mongolian timber mills. The combination has left Mongolia's timber industry in a shambles.

Prior to 1990, ten organisations used 20 machines to prepare wood. Nowadays, more timber mills have arrived, though many wood buyers agree that the quality of the product is low.

"National products have decreased and people saw their get rich quick opportunity and shipped a lot of wood off to China at no cost," Enkhtaivan said.

The lost wood has caused havoc on the domestic market. The price of wood drops and local companies can't get their hands on wood. The state policy to support national manufacturers is lost.

"If we are going to live in harmony with nature, animals and elements, we have got to pay better attention to our forests and our water reserves," Enkhtaivan says.

BBC

07-07-98

REP: Communism collectivised livestock ownership - now it is private and families like Oralmaa's have set about expanding their herds:

tape band five

act. oralmaa, English translation as follows:

"If I compare our lives with the lives of people who live in the city - I'm much better off. The income of the family has increased a lot. Our living standard has improved, we have many animals. The animals are our investment and our assets. People in the city don't have any assets and we didn't when we lived there. Each person in our family can now say they own many animals."

REP: There's milk and meat and money to be made from animal husbandry. Cashmere - that's the fine and highly prized wool of goats - is considered the big money-spinner because it's coveted in the west. Most Mongolians are trying to make the country and themselves rich on cashmere exports. But there's a downside to that dependence on livestock - there are now simply too many heads of cattle and sheep in the country - and pastures are getting overgrazed:

tape band six

act. gardner

"Overgrazing is particularly a problem around the market centres where cattle are being brought in for sale and there tends to be concentration around the secondary cities - you have overgrazing, you run the risk of killing the goose that's laying the golden egg. Through overgrazing the rains come, you lose the topsoil and in the next season you don't get any grass for the livestock to graze on."

REP: The slow decline in the quality of pastures and therefore herds could cost Mongolia dear. Now plans are afoot to improve productivity - to have fewer but only quality cashmere goats and perhaps even expand the frozen meat industry which currently only manages to truck a few carcasses across the borders into China or Russia. But first there are other hurdles to overcome:

tape band seven

act. debate in parliament over banking

REP: The critical banking debate in parliament broadcast live on Mongolian radio stations - when Mongolia's state-run bank merged with a private one earlier this year there were angry exchanges in parliament as opposition MPs complained about corruption and nepotism. You might not think to link this with agriculture, but according to Douglas Gardner, reform of the banking sector is vital in easing the over-dependence on animals:

tape band eight

act. gardner

"As the banking system gets back on its feet - that will allow people to keep their wealth in a bank rather than trying to have more and more livestock as the place where they put their wealth. I think all those things are linked and as Mongolia grows and the banking system gets back on its feet and people see the benefit from getting maximum productivity from each animal rather than simply expanding the numbers of animals - the overgrazing issue will be addressed in that fashion."

[bring in tape one band seven - act. of debate again - start fading up under gardeners last words, bring up and fade under reporter's next link.]

REP: These solutions are a long way off - Mongolian politicians are still in the throes of discussion about the country's future course. And though Mongolians have averted starvation by going back to the land, they've had to change their diet and malnutrition among children is sixty per cent higher than it was under communism. Oralmaa and her daughters have chosen their way of life - and it'll be many years before they can afford to abandon it:

tape band nine

act. oralmaa, English translation as follows:

As far as my children are concerned - well, they'll probably both be herders because at this time in our country, salaries are very low in the city even if you've graduated for college. But my grandchildren - that might be different. My husband and I are working hard to ensure my grandchildren's education - by then things might be different. It depends on the transition - whether it leads to jobs in the city or not - but for a few years at least it's best to stay a herder.

IPS

26 June 1998

LENGTH: 1053 words**HEADLINE:** DEVELOPMENT-MONGOLIA: SPUTTERING ON FREE MARKET TRACK**BYLINE:** By Suvendrini Kakuchi**DATELINE:** ULAN BATOR, Jun. 25**BODY:**

He lost his job three years ago and what he now makes from selling bedsheets and other work here in the bustling capital of Mongolia is not even a third of what officials say a Mongolian family needs to live decently.

But former driver Hatanbold considers himself luckier than most Mongolians who are still trying to make sense of -- as well as a living in -- the country's fledgling market economy.

The former socialist country had taken a democratic turn in 1990, effectively ending the steady Soviet support that had kept its economy going for 72 years. Other countries such as Japan and the United States extended a hand as Mongolia struggled to keep on track while experimenting with a new economic system.

It managed an economic spurt of 3.3 percent in 1997 while growth this year is expected to reach five percent. But the east Central Asian country is still striving to keep inflation less than 20 percent.

It is also trying to avert social turmoil as the ranks of the unemployed swell -- more than 72,000 of a total population of 2.4 million -- and contribute to a rising discontent.

Government reports say the number of poor families grew by 46,200 in 1997. At present nearly 588,000 people, or about a fourth of the population, eke out a miserable existence.

And until he got "lucky" two years ago, Hatanbold, who looks older than his 34 years, was like most of the people who were in shock with the changes brought about by the new economic system.

In 1995, Hatanbold had lost his old driver's job that, along with his education and health needs, he had always taken for granted under the socialist system. He was jobless for a year until he joined the shop and tailors project called 'Tsekh'.

The project began in 1996 with a loan of 800,000 tugriks (930 dollars) from a Poverty Fund offered jointly by World Bank and the **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** to improve living standards in Mongolia.

A father of two children, Hatanbold earns 30,000 tugriks (about 34 dollars) a month that he says he spends solely on his family.

Given the rising prices of daily commodities, though, his income may not be buying much. Economists also reckon that for a Mongolian family to lead a comfortable life, its average monthly income should be 200,000 tugriks (\$ 232).

But observers say Hatanbold is right in considering himself fortunate. After all, only a select few are chosen as beneficiaries for the loans offered by the World Bank and **UNDP**. Indeed, only 25 out of an average of 3,000 applicants are selected each year to avail of the loans.

Ten people, including women and the disabled, are involved in the project that brings them a steady income through selling bedsheets and the 'del' (the traditional Mongolian garment) that they sew themselves. They also run a tiny bakery on one side of the shop.

The group rents a dingy room - actually a renovated toilet -- in a crumbling grey building that is part of a huge housing complex in the center of Ulan Bator. According to the project's figures, the workers spend 60 percent of their income on food and the rest on rent and their children's schooling.

The work schedules are rotated among the staff. That is why Hatanbold sometimes sews shirts, while other days see him off to the Chinese border where he buys material for the sheets. There are also days when he is in charge of selling the items made by the group.

(See next page)



"On a good day I sell between five and ten sheets," Hatanbold says, his wizened brown face breaking into a rare smile. Those "special sales days" usually happen at the capital's open-air Black Market, where hawkers do booming business selling anything from fashionable Chinese-made apparel to rotten apples.

But with considerably cash-strapped shoppers always on the look-out for bargains, sellers like Hatanbold have to employ much charm and patience for each single sale. To be sure, it is a far cry from the way life Hatanbold and the rest of Mongolians had been used to, in which the state took care of things for them.

Ironically, Mongolia itself seems to be having trouble practicing the same self-reliance it now expects its citizens.

Economist S. Nyamzagd, head of the Institute of Commerce says the country, which was left without industrial or commercial base or sophisticated infrastructure when the Russians left, remains heavily reliant on foreign investment to improve the situation.

"The democratic government is desperately seeking foreign investment that will develop our transportation, energy, post and communication sectors," he says. "Mongolia has vast untapped natural resources and can develop its farming and tourism industries."

Copper, cashmere and gold are still Mongolia's main sources of foreign currency. But revenue from these commodities has taken a beating. World prices for copper and goatskin have plunged and the national budget suffered a shortfall of more than 30 billion tugriks (\$ 35 million) at the start of the current year.

At the request of the Mongolian government, Japan provides 10 to 15 billion yen (now just \$ 69 to \$ 100 million) each year, making it the country's top donor. The assistance is geared toward improving Mongolia's ageing infrastructure -- mostly related to transport and electricity, which analysts contend is one way of attracting foreign investment.

But Japanese business experts say the going for the country will not be easy. Landlocked, Mongolia lacks a port and has a small population -- almost half of whom are herdsmen.

"Mongolia has to compete with countries like China and Vietnam for Japanese investment. Both the countries have the advantages that Mongolia has not -- sea ports and big populations," explains Professor Shinichi Kobuchi, at Asia University in Tokyo.

Most Mongolians believe, however, that they are already on a modernization path that does not leave them much room to make a U-turn back to the old system.

And many of them are like Hatanbold, who is determined to make life better for his family despite mounting odds. "Our lives after the old system broke down is hard," Hatanbold says softly, "but we have to do it or be left out of the outside world. We have to be strong and work hard for the next generation."

UNDP - US News for June 26 1998

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Enough Already! Mongolia begins to chafe as free-market reforms bite By Lincoln Kaye in Ulan Bator

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Leaders of Mongolia's ruling democratic coalition laid on a roasted goat to greet visiting U.S. Senator John McCain on August 19. The feast celebrated the triumph of McCain's International Republican Institute, whose advice and assistance helped the democrats sweep to an upset victory last year, ending 75 years of communist rule in Mongolia.

But the event they were celebrating was more than a year old, and much had happened in the interim to dampen spirits at the festivities. Just a day earlier, in fact, the democrats had been dealt a crushing blow in a crucial by-election in the mountainous western province of Zavkhan. Over the past year, the once-dominant communists have regained hold of the national presidency and most provincial and local governments. The Zavkhan rout wiped out the democrats' last hope of achieving a parliamentary quorum.

Mongolia's rightward lurch, which brought such high hopes in business circles last year, now looks on the brink of sputtering out. The democrats have managed to enact about half of their "Contract with Mongolia" — the business-friendly manifesto modelled overtly on the 1994 Republican "Contract with America." But when the Mongolian parliament reconvenes in October after its current recess, two possibilities loom. One is gridlock; the other is a break-up of the democratic coalition and a new majority for a communist-led partnership. Either way, it looks like heavy weather ahead for the Contract and its reformist agenda.

That's unfortunate, say aid donors and foreign investors, who still hail the Contract as a necessary, if painful, course of action for a post-socialist economy and society. The problem: So far, the democrats' "shock therapy" has been far more shocking than therapeutic. "Real income for average Mongolians has dropped by 30% in the one year since we've been in power," admits MP Baterdene Batbayar, founding chairman of the Social Democratic Party. "If we don't make up these losses and reverse the trend, we'll be in trouble by the year 2000" when the current parliamentary term ends.

Of course, some of the problems were unavoidable. Within a month of the 1996 election, world copper prices collapsed, wiping out a quarter of Mongolia's state revenues and aborting the Contract's budget-balancing pledges.

The new parliament quickly decontrolled all prices, triggering a sharp upturn in inflation: Prices have ballooned by nearly 4% a month so far this year.

The coalition also halved the number of government ministries, sending hordes of bureaucrats to join the swelling ranks of the unemployed, conservatively estimated at 28% of the working-age population. Then the democrats stripped

all tariff protection from domestic industries, sparking yet more joblessness and paving the way for an environmentally reckless rush to extract and export unprocessed raw materials.

The government also nominally lowered tax rates but stepped up enforcement so that middle-class Mongolians — the democrats' natural constituents felt the tax bite as never before. Now parliament is mooting a regressive value-added tax to help ease its budgetary woes.

That was the reform part. But the democrats forgot some of their election pledges too. Early on, instead of passing a laissez-faire press law as promised, the coalition purged established journalists and packed newsrooms with their own apologists. And as the economy soured, coalition politicians helped themselves to conspicuous perks of office that even the communists had never dared flaunt. The democratic mayor of Ulan Bator, for instance, has taken to driving around town in an ostentatious limousine.

To IRI's Mongolian programme director, Kirsten Edmondston, the coalition's main problem is public relations. "They were great at getting their message across before the 1996 election," she says. "But they just stopped explaining themselves to the people once in power."

Alicia Campi, a former American diplomat who now runs her own Mongolia-focused consultancy, suspects a deeper problem. She says the Contract's free-market tenets encouraging wealth accumulation and manipulating individual spending and saving decisions "might simply not hold true in Mongolia's fundamentally nomadic economy, where the concept of immovable property has little motivational force."

Whatever their source, the problems have clearly reversed the democrats' fortunes. Within four months of capturing parliament, the coalition lost a round of provincial and county elections. Then, in May, the communist party chairman and Zavkhan member of parliament, N. Bagabandi, trounced a pro-democrat incumbent to become Mongolia's president.

This office carries more than ceremonial status. A presidential veto of any legislation can only be overridden by a two-thirds majority of the 76-member parliament. Although the coalition has been one seat short of this mark since the democrats' big victory, it didn't matter much when there was a compliant president in office. Now, all bets are off.

The only way to avoid gridlock would have been for the coalition to capture the last outstanding seat in parliament — the one vacated in Zavkhan by the newly elected president. Instead, the communist candidate, N. Enkhbayar, won 73% of the vote by offering himself as a necessary check on the coalition's ruling majority.

Now, even that majority looks shaky. Before the by-election, Batbayar led his Social Democrats out of the coalition caucus to form a separate parliamentary faction. When

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the house reconvenes, he says, "we'll see what position the two other major parties take in light of the new situation before deciding how to align ourselves." He doesn't rule out the possibility of joining the communists.

The SDP holds 15 seats, which joined with the communists' 25 would trump the National Democrats' 35. Even if the current coalition manages to hang together, the democrats could wind up bearing the blame for the short-term woes of economic restructuring, and the reinvigorated communists could recapture parliament in 2000, just in time to reap the benefits. But IRI's Edmondston ventures to hope that the communists won't be too obstructionist even after their electoral triumphs. "Now that they've won veto power over parliament, they'll have to assume joint responsibility for the success of reforms," she predicts.

Whatever turn the new parliamentary alignment takes, Batbayar is confident that reform will still go on. "None of the parties contemplate a retreat from political and economic liberalization," he says. "The differences between us are only tactical, a question of pace."

The public may have other ideas, though, according to Dashbalbar Ochirbat, a communist-leaning independent MP. He predicts massive anti-"shock therapy" protests this winter, bigger than the 1989 demonstrations that set the communists on the path to political pluralism. "The people's suffering has grown too grave to endure in silence any more," he declares. "I stand ready to lead them to national renewal."

(See related letter: "LETTERS Mongolia 's Up There, Really" FEER Oct. 23, 1997)



A Mongolian Shopping Spree Fizzles

Thursday June 25, 1998

By Thomas Crampton International Herald Tribune

ULAAN BAATAR, Mongolia - Asia's economic crisis meant bargain shopping for some Mongolian consumers.

They surged abroad on their first Western-style spending spree, bringing back plane-loads of South Korean goods and buying four-wheel-drive vehicles from dealers here.

Now comes the hangover.

The spending binge has ended with a national banking crisis as the Mongolian government discovered that no Asian nation is too remote to escape the region's economic downturn.

"Myself, I thought we were an isolated economy, but this shows how we are all inter-related," Finance Minister B. Batbayar said in an interview on Wednesday, adding that the crisis would not slow down liberalization of his country's economy.

Banks made too many loans for the purchase of foreign consumer goods, helping lead to a rise in bad loans and the recent collapse of the state-owned Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

For nearly a year after currency turmoil swept across Asia, Mongolia's tugrik held a steady value against the dollar, while the price of copper, the country's largest export, rose by nearly 10 percent last year.

On the strength of their currency, Mongolian consumers began a spending binge in January in crisis-hit South Korea, where the won had plunged against the dollar.

The number of flights to Seoul increased to three per week from the normal one and, according to Mr. Batbayar, virtually every aircraft was full of bargain hunters.

Travelers returned with their baggage full of cheap consumer goods. Then a new Daewoo car dealership opened here, sending late-model off-road vehicles pouring onto the dusty streets of Ulaan Baatar.

The country's banks helped pay for the shopping expeditions, extending loans worth 15 billion tugriks during the first four months of the year.

Along Peace Avenue, the capital's main commercial street, shops opened over the last few months selling microwave ovens, videocassette

recorders and other items impossible to get under the country's previous Soviet-style economic regime.

"We have got so many new Korean products now," said Nyama, a student at the Economics University here. She has made two shopping trips to Seoul since December.

Buying 10 Hewlett-Packard laser printers for \$250 each, she resold them in Mongolia for twice the price.

For many Mongolians, the last few months have been their first taste of consumer culture. One of the poorest countries in the world, the average annual cash income is little more than \$360.

Landlocked between Siberia and northern China, this country of 2.5 million people is still making the difficult transition from a Soviet-style command economy to capitalism.

For more than 60 years, Mongolia was in effect a colony of the Soviet empire, receiving massive economic subsidies while selling copper and other natural resources in return.

Vestiges of this Soviet-era economy, including a lack of financial understanding and an overdependence on commodities, have combined with Asia's sharp economic downturn to drive Mongolia into a private and public sector crisis, Mr. Batbayar said.

The state-owned Bank of Reconstruction and Development had been under investigation since February and banned from further lending, but it continued extending credit worth 4 billion tugrik until the government forced it to merge with the privately-owned Golomt Bank early this month.

Opposition members of Parliament have alleged corruption in the deal, highlighting the bank's continued lending as well as the tight connections between the Golomt Bank's president and the prime minister's party.

At the same time, as Mongolians began trading tugriks for foreign consumer goods, the value of the country's exports collapsed due to falling prices for copper, gold and cashmere.

Largely attributed to Asia's economic slowdown, copper prices fell 23 percent in the first four months of this year.

Combined with increased overseas spending, the export slowdown sent Mongolia's trade balance spiraling into a deficit of \$72 million for the first four months of this year.

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That compares with a surplus of \$10 million for the same period last year.

The currency has come under tremendous pressure, forcing the central bank to spend 15 percent of its reserves since May propping up the currency at the twice-monthly foreign currency auctions, Mr. Batbayar said.

Reserves now stand at \$80 million, he added.

The falling copper prices are also slashing the already strained government budget. The state-owned Erdenet Copper Corp. supplies nearly a quarter of the Mongolian government's revenue.

This year's budget was planned on a world copper price of \$2,100 per ton but the price has now fallen to nearly \$1,600

Erdenet's difficulties have created a dangerous debt chain, Mr. Batbayar said, noting that the mining company has been unable to pay electricity its bills.

The company currently consumes approximately 30 percent of the country's total energy.

"We must privatize Erdenet soon because the state's budget should not depend on one company alone; it would be better to earn it collecting taxes," the finance minister said, adding that the sell-off would take place by the year 2000.

Despite the looming crisis, Mr. Batbayar remained optimistic about the progress of the Mongolian economy. "Our foreign reserves were zero between 1990 and 1994, so to have nearly \$100 million now is quite an achievement," he said.



In Mongolia, nomads leave 20th century behind for pastoral life

JOHN LEICESTER, Associated Press Writer

(01-06) 01:38 EST HURANDEL HILLS, Mongolia (AP) — The wan winter sun dipped and died on the frozen horizon, losing its vain struggle to warm Mongolia's icy steppe. Wind-whipped twists of snow pirouetted in the deepening twilight.

But in the toasty confines of Tsagaan's yurt, heartwarming talk of family and the future mixed with the aroma of boiling horse meat.

Shielded from the cold by the thick, felt walls of his circular, tent-like home, the 67-year-old glowed with pride as his eldest son explained why he decided to follow his father and take up life on the steppe.

"To live as free as a nomad is very exciting," Aryuntor said with wide-eyed conviction. "This endless land and freedom really attracts me."

While millions of farmers elsewhere search for new lives in cities, Aryuntor — whose name means "Holy State" — is heading the other way. He is swapping the comforts of town for a pastoral existence that in some ways is little changed from when Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan created one of the world's largest empires 800 years ago.

Aryuntor is not alone. One-third of Mongolia's 2.4 million people live as nomads or in small hamlets in the plains, mountains and deserts of this landlocked country more than twice the size of Texas. Some figures indicate that unlike many other countries, the rural population is growing in Mongolia.

In Aryuntor's case, hard economic realities, not just a love of the open plains, drove him out of town.

The 25-year-old plans to marry next year. He said the \$28 monthly salary he earned as a dance teacher in Zuunmod, a town 15 miles from the snow-swept hills where his father's yurt is pitched, could not support his future family, even with a sideline business sewing clothes and boots.

"It wasn't really working, so I chose to be a nomad," he said. "I didn't want my wife to suffer because I didn't have enough money. I didn't want my kids to go hungry."

Many have felt the pinch since Mongolia threw off authoritarian communist rule in 1990 and began embracing market reforms. Poverty and unemployment have increased. A gap between rich and poor has left street kids in Ulan Bator, the capital, shivering in underground heating ducts while the newly wealthy parade around in plush cars.

Some aid workers believe Mongolia's large rural population has played a vital role in cushioning the shock of change. People in Ulan Bator and impoverished provincial towns have been able to get meat from relatives in the countryside, keeping them from going hungry in hard times.

Tsagaan said his life has neither improved nor worsened since the end of communist rule. The 15 sheep and goats he bought in 1992 have grown to a flock of more than 100. His \$17 state pension buys flour for his family of seven children, many of whom live and study in Zuunmod.

"We don't eat twice, but we don't sleep without eating," he said.

That night, supper was soft-boiled chunks of horse meat with potatoes and flat steamed bread, cooked on an iron stove fueled with dried dung.

Tsagaan fished out a long pipe tucked down the front of one of his calf-length boots, packed it with tobacco and lit it through the stove door, bathing the yurt in warm, orange light and sending puffs of sweet-smelling smoke into the air.

Aryuntor said his parents would buy a new yurt for him and his future wife, who teaches dance in Zuunmod. Her parents will buy the furniture. They will place the yurt, which two people can erect in two hours, next to his father's and raise their herds together. Eventually, he hopes to buy a generator, refrigerator and television for their movable home.

But first, Aryuntor said he must perfect his nomad skills. He said he still has much to learn about breaking in young horses, how not to overgraze pasture, and how to bed down animals and make sure they eat enough salt.

"Sometimes it is easy, sometimes it is hard. But because my father is experienced, I am learning the difficulties. There are many things I don't know," he said.

While he sometimes longs for town, country living has its compensations, he said.

"I would like to see my friends, talk, have a party. I miss those kind of things," he said.

But "here you have boundless space, with fresh air. I feel happy when I have the precious moment of getting up in the morning and tending my horses, and seeing the sunset. You can never experience this in the city," he added.



Time #3 9/1/97 Time Asia

ASIA

Mongolian Rhapsody

A new kind of entrepreneur leads the charge to rev up the former communist nation's ailing economy

BY ANTHONY SPAETH

In Mongolia, a national delicacy is horhog, a goat stuffed with heated rocks that cook it from within. The usual accompaniment is bread or doughy dumplings, made from flour that might very well have been supplied by Tsatsral, one of Mongolia's busiest entrepreneurs.

In February, Tsatsral and her husband Tsengun (like many Mongolians, they use only one name) took over Altan Taria, one of the country's largest flour mills, and moved into the executive suite with a portrait of Lenin mounted on the wall. "We haven't had time to redecorate," says Tsatsral, who keeps a copy of Margaret Thatcher's memoirs near her desk. "When we do, we'll get rid of Lenin."

Getting rid of Lenin has been a strain for all the former countries of the Soviet empire. Mongolia, which in 1924 became the world's second communist state after Russia, has had an especially tough time. Communists continued running the government until last year; their economic reforms were both painful and incomplete. About one-third of the workforce is unemployed, and the country's most important resource remains its 28.5 million goats, sheep, cattle, horses and camels. The human population is only 2.4 million.

But a new herd is massing in Mongolia, composed of hungry entrepreneurs. The thunder of their ambition can be heard nightly in Ulan Bator, the capital, where a lively nightclub scene has erupted, replete with rock bands and miniskirted ladies of the night. Daylight exposes a Stalinistically planned city of new cafes, tailor's shops and beauty parlors. "When you look at Mongolia, sure, the macroeconomic indicators aren't showing any progress," says Jim McCracken, economic and consular officer at the U.S. Embassy in Ulan Bator. "But when you walk down the street, you see new businesses starting up every day. That says something good."

The new Mongolia is a strange, ever-evolving land. The widespread religion, a Tibetan-type of Buddhism, is reviving, along with a reverence for Genghis Khan, the 13th century conqueror whose cult was suppressed by the Soviets for decades (Khan's face now graces the currency, displacing a Soviet-era revolutionary hero). The country's historical isolation is breaking down fast: the traditional evening entertainment of slurping fermented mare's milk in a neighbor's tent has given way to nights in front of a television set-Baywatch is a hit—with a six-pack of Coca-Cola. Elections were introduced in 1990, and last summer a pro-reform democratic government was voted to power after getting campaign advice from both

former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and a Republican Party think tank. The democrats promised voters a Mongolian Contract centered on selling off state-run businesses, many of which were on the verge of collapse after Soviet subsidies ended.

Tsatsral and Tsengun were the first to close a deal. With the backing of a Czech company, they bought the government's 51% share of Altan Taria for \$1 million—the average yearly profits of the mill.

"This is a great opportunity," she says. "It's a guaranteed market."

But the deal had some stringent conditions.

Tsatsral promised to replace the venerable Russian equipment, at a cost of more than \$5 million, and not to reduce the 260-member workforce. "I found that there were 60 mechanics," she says.

"Which explains why this old equipment worked so well."

Enkhbat is a computer engineer educated in the Russian cities of Yekaterinburg and Moscow. In the 1980s, he had a contract to run the Mongolian government's mainframe computer in Ulan Bator, but when subsidies from Moscow ended, his contract was canceled. "I wondered what I would do," he says. "I had no idea." Enkhbat and 20 colleagues took advantage of an early privatization scheme that distributed vouchers in public companies to the Mongolian population. They amassed enough vouchers to take over their enterprise, renamed it DataCom and, with a \$60,000 grant from a Canadian aid organization, started an Internet service provider. They now have 1,000 subscribers and dreams of hooking up the most remote areas of the country.

The new government, led by Prime Minister M.Enkhsaikhon, has taken heat for its reformist policies, which have yet to translate into substantially better economic growth figures.

In May, Bagabandi, a former communist, was elected President; though the democrats still control parliament, they are one vote short of overriding a presidential veto. "Things aren't so good now," concedes Enkhbold, 31, chairman of the government's privatization committee. "It's a real difficult process, this transition. But in two to ten years, things will be good."

Some in Mongolia don't have to wait that long. Tulga, a carpenter, decided last year that his \$200 monthly salary from the U.S. Embassy in Ulan Bator was not enough. He and several friends raised \$3,000, borrowed an equal amount from a bank and persuaded a friend to donate an empty apartment for conversion into a cafe. Getting the proper permits was the most arduous task; Tulga's wife had to sew him a suit for his endless calls on officials. The Donna Cafe opened last fall. It has only two tables and a bar, serving plenty of drinks and simple Mongolian fare. "People have more money," Tulga says, himself included. Tulga and his partners now make an extra \$65 a month each.

-Reported by Leah Kohlenberg/Ulan Bator

THE IRISH TIMES

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FINANCE

Thursday, September 24, 1998

Asian crisis has already cost over 10 million jobs

By Padraig Yeates, Industry and Employment Correspondent

Ten million workers have lost their jobs already this year as a result of the financial crisis in the Far East and "millions more" will do so by the end of the year, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The ILO's World Employment Report for 1998 also says a third of the world's workforce of three billion remains either unemployed or underemployed. One striking feature of international employment trends is the rapid growth in female participation in the workforce in all regions. However, much of this continues to be in part-time employment.

This year's report contrasts sharply with last year's edition, which predicted substantial employment growth.

It shows that Ireland's unemployment has been falling faster than that of any other OECD country, while increases in real wages have been about average for this group of developed economies. The report says that the competitiveness of OECD countries has improved significantly because of low commodity prices.

However, it also says that these prices reduce demand in developing countries, as well as the ability of governments and commercial sectors in these regions to improve productivity.

It warns that deflation, which could spread rapidly from the Far East to other parts of the world, would have a

Economics

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particularly harsh impact on the developing world.

Asian economies in transition to a market economy, such as China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Mongolia, will face huge unemployment problems "because of their vast amount of excess labour in state and collective enterprises".

The report warns that in other Asian countries the "financial crisis has shown the costs of neglecting social concerns. The pace of globalisation has been primarily driven by market forces, and the national, and to some extent international rules, institutions and practices needed to render its consequences socially acceptable have been insufficiently developed.

"Even the high-income East Asian countries are ill-prepared to cope with their own labour displacement in a socially acceptable manner, since they hardly felt the need to build up the necessary agencies and practices."

One lesson that had emerged from the current crisis was the "volatility of especially short-term capital flows; these can act as a strong force triggering a currency crisis, especially in over-indebted economies with fragile banking systems". The report says the slight recovery in the Russian economy will be wiped out by "recent turmoil" in the financial markets.

The crisis in the Far East also threatens the recovery of traditionally depressed regions like South America and, of course, Africa. In Africa, the growth rates of many countries were rising by between 5 and 6 per cent last year because of good harvests, improved export prices and structural reforms.

Traditionally one of the worst regions for unemployment, production growth is still making little impact on employment

The ILO is a UN-sponsored body through which the world's governments, trade unions and employer bodies agree international conventions on employment.

Model City of the Soviet Era Changes Its Plan

Taking a Steppe Back / Mongolians Return to Traditional Nomadism

23/07/98

By Thomas Crampton International Herald Tribune

DARKHAN, Mongolia - It took peculiar logic, residents of this city say, to erect high-rise towers in the middle of the Mongolian wilderness.

There is no obvious reason for Darkhan to exist. There is no confluence of rivers, unique natural resource or object of religious pilgrimage.

But at a site selected seemingly at random among thousands of featureless hills, the best and the brightest Soviet engineers transformed this minor railway stop near the Siberian border into Mongolia's second-largest city and a paragon of industrial socialism.

Now, with the collapse of the Soviet system that supported it, Darkhan is stuck with a painful transition from socialism to capitalism that the governor hopes to cushion with the indigenous economic model: nomadism.

"We are encouraging people to leave their apartments, buy animals and go live in yurts," said V. Vandansuren, governor of Darkhan. Yurts are traditional felt-covered Mongolian tents. "There is just no way for so many people to live in this city the way it was designed."

In the last year, the government spent 40 million tugriks (\$47,000) on training 250 families and supplying them with seed so they could grow crops. Several new companies sell yurts to those leaving their apartments.

"People are so confused with the new system, but I explain to them that it costs less to live in a yurt," Mr. Vandansuren said. "You can feed yourself on herd animals and heat the yurt with dried manure."

Mongolia, like other Soviet nations in the Soviet bloc, received massive assistance to create national road and telephone networks, hospitals, schools and factories. But the return of Darkhan to traditional agriculture ends a 40-year experiment, which was blessed in person by the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, to bring nomadic herdsmen into modern apartment blocks and a socialist mentality.

Prize-winning architects and thousands of foreign experts were drafted from Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to build the finest factories the Soviet world

could offer.

High-rise buildings grew out of the Mongolian steppes. Near them, factories poured forth cement, well-made leather coats and canned meat.

Centrally planned down to the smallest detail, Darkhan's residential area is built upwind of the industrial zone to protect it from air pollution.

Buses carried workers on a specially built highway to the factories at dawn and dropped them off each evening in front of one of the two stores that the city's 60,000 residents used.

The apartments included luxuries unheard of in the harsh Mongolian wilderness: indoor plumbing, electricity, central heating and special plugs in each room for a radio tuned to the government station.

Now, with the markets of the Soviet world no longer buying Mongolia's products, virtually all the factories in the industrial zone have gone bust.

Confronted with this new economic reality, Darkhan's residents are physically destroying the city's once highly regimented order. Nomadic herdsmen graze animals in the formerly protected city parks and a market now thrives in the suburbs.

The two government shops have lost most of their clientele to small wooden kiosks that have popped up amid the apartment blocks. Some wealthier shop owners have started smashing the walls down between ground floor apartments to create enlarged shops.

WITH few housing regulations enforced, residents with a mind to barbecue meat in the traditional style simply stoke their fire and shove a pipe into an air duct to vent the smoke, thus sending the scent of mutton wafting throughout the building.

To earn money, many have turned to trade.

Ever since he lost his job at the state construction company in 1992, C. Lkhagvasuren has sold a green homemade soft drink during the summer months and invested his profits, with friends' money, in used cars from Europe.

"There are many difficult times during the drive when you must pay bribes to Russian police," Mr. Lkhagvasuren said of the 18-day drive back across Siberia. "But this new economic system allows me to show my ability."

The 30-vehicle caravans of used Fords, Nissans and BMWs

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reap profits of nearly \$1,000 per car, he said.

Many who have not taken up the so-called "suitcase business" of petty trade leave the model city to return to the life of nomadic herdsman.

L. Bayaubajav, 58, was a medal-winning worker in Darkhan's model food-processing factory for two decades, until 1990, when he was forced to return to his ancestral occupation of herdsman.

"There is fresh air and freedom out here. I don't miss anything about living in an apartment in the city," said Mr. Bayaubajav, who now lives an hour's drive outside Darkhan. "I started here with one cow, and now I have 10, along with 40 sheep and 10 horses."

A few minutes away live J. Altan-od and B. Mart, both 22, who married and moved into a yurt after having spent their entire lives in the city and without any knowledge of caring for animals.

"It was very difficult to begin with," Mr. Altan-od said. "You can't see your friends and don't have any place to go out in the evening." Arriving at the start of the harsh Mongolian winter, the couple lasted five months in a grandfather's yurt before selling half their cows to buy a wooden house.

Despite the hardships imposed on people by the rapidly collapsing economy, virtually all Darkhan's residents, including expatriate Russians specialists stripped of former privileges, sounded glad that communism had fallen.

"Under the old system, Russians had good jobs, saunas, a tennis court and billiards tables, but we could not even talk to the Mongolians," said Ludmila Voronkina, a Russian nurse who came to Darkhan a decade ago. "Now my son speaks Mongolian, and everyone in our family has Mongolian friends."



Chinese Look to Their Neighbors for New Opportunities to Trade

08/04/98

By Thomas Crampton International Herald Tribune

ULAAN BAATAR, Mongolia — A prolonged period of regional peace, combined with the collapse of the Soviet Union, has brought sharp shifts of trade patterns along the borders of China.

Relaxed restrictions have paved the way for Chinese traders to sell a flood of cheap goods to such poor and formerly isolated neighbors as Burma, Laos, Mongolia and Vietnam.

Consumers snap up inexpensive Chinese-made building materials and plastic shoes, but many living along the edge of the world's most populous nation remain wary of ulterior motives.

"Why do the Chinese come here?" asked R. Munkbat, a trader running a small shop in the Mongolian capital that sells soap, soft drinks and other household goods, including some from China. "China is so big that I am sure they want to try to take over Mongolia again."

To China's south, recent treaties with Burma have ended years of bloody fighting and resulted in thriving trade and casino businesses along the border. But a distaste for the new trade is emphasized by merchants who complain about an onslaught of low-priced, inferior-quality goods and an often-repeated story that Burma's dogs and cats were being exported to China for food.

In Vietnam, a traditional enemy of China, Hanoi has frequently griped that China is undermining the country's economy with an invasion of cheap exports.

In Mongolia's case, suspicion of China is deep and historic. The 19th century domination by Beijing that ended with the integration of Nei Monggol, or Inner Mongolia, into China remains a more bitter memory than the recently ended 70 years of Soviet-backed dictatorship.

Wary of Mongolian sensibilities, Chinese business executives tend to keep a low profile, but Beijing has been actively courting the government. Since 1991, China's president, prime minister, speaker of Parliament, foreign minister and the son of the late leader Deng Xiaoping have all visited Mongolia.

The concrete result of this increased interaction is a treaty that completely opens the border between China and Mongolia for at least 30 days a year.

Beijing's friendship offensive comes as cash-strapped Moscow is unable to keep up a Soviet-era level of influence in Ulaan Baatar. Diplomats describe the shift of influence in Mongolia from Moscow to Beijing as the eastern fringe of the mod-

ern struggle for power in Central Asia.

A decade ago, almost no trade and investment came to Mongolia from China. Since opening up in 1991, Mongolia's trade with China has grown to \$250 million in 1997. Mongolia's exports to China rose 24 percent in the first three months of this year compared with the same period last year.

By some estimates, China now buys nearly half of everything Mongolia exports, including copper sent for accounting reasons through Switzerland.

As foreign investors, the Chinese, with 260 joint ventures in production of clothes and milk and in the construction industry, now outnumber all other nationalities.

The strongest effect of Chinese businesses is being felt in the cashmere and textiles industries. Mongolian cashmere factory owners complain that the more pro-active Chinese traders buy up the raw goats fur and refine it in China at lower cost.

"I just cannot compete with them on their tight margins," a cashmere processor said at a recent investors conference in Ulaan Baatar.

Government officials also allege that Chinese traders are taking advantage of low tariffs accorded Mongolia through its membership in the World Trade Organization. Although no new factories have been built in Mongolia, the country's textile exports more than doubled in the first quarter of this year to 10 billion tugriks (\$12.2 million) from 4.8 billion tugriks for the same period last year.

"Trade can be good, but we must be careful with China and be certain that rules are established," an adviser to Mongolia's prime minister said.

Along the Chinese border in Burma's Shan State, local merchants and former rulers of the northern states also fear the consequences of open trade with their gigantic neighbor.

"We're the next Tibet," a prominent hereditary ruler of Shan province told a visitor, describing the flood of traders and lengthy convoys of Chinese trucks carrying away Burma's tropical forest.



Associated Press

13-01-99

Shaken by economic changes, some Mongolians take to drink

Associated Press

January 13, 1999

Web posted at: 1:46 AM EST (0646 GMT)

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia (AP) — It's 10:30 p.m., and Ulan Bator's drunks are howling. Out of their mind on cheap liquor, they rant and rattle the iron bars of a police cell. The stink of vodka and unwashed bodies hangs heavy in the air.

Some are professional men. Others are youngsters, caught for getting rowdy in bars. Many are unemployed or poor — the underclass that has suffered most from Mongolia's switch to democracy and a market economy.

In the nine years since popular protests helped end authoritarian communist rule, Mongolia has seen once empty shops fill with food and goods. An emerging private economy is creating new jobs. Restaurants and bars are springing up across Ulan Bator, the capital. Entrepreneurs cruise the city in their own cars and chat on mobile phones.

But for many people, change has been brutal. The closure and privatization of state firms put many out of work. Poverty has increased and a gap has opened between rich and poor. The psychological pressures of adapting to the vagaries of the market after seven decades of a state-commanded economy are taking their toll.

The result, police and legislators say, has been an outbreak of alcohol abuse in a country that traditionally espoused sobriety.

"This transition is very abrupt. There is a lot of unemployment. They have lost hope, so they seem to find comfort in drink," said Davaasuren, a police captain who, like many Mongolians, uses only one name.

"The transition has put too much pressure on people's mentality," he said in an interview occasionally interrupted by slurred yells from a drunken woman brought in by patrolling officers and left slumped against a wall of the police station.

Some longtime foreign residents say alcohol abuse seems less widespread than the toughest years immediately after Mongolia's switch to democracy, when drunks were often seen slumped on sidewalks.

But Davaasuren, who oversees a network of seven holding tanks across the capital for drunks picked up by police, thinks the problem is getting worse. Officers made 56,852 detentions for drunkenness in 1997, he said or a little over 150 a day in a city of 650,000 people.

Theft, rape, murder and other crimes committed under the influence of alcohol are rising. "Most of the crimes are committed by people who are drunk," Davaasuren said.

Mongolia's president, Natsagiin Bagabandi, said experts have identified alcohol abuse as "a potential threat to the national

security." He has appeared on TV and radio to appeal moderation and plans to submit an amended law against alcoholism to parliament shortly.

Hashbat Hulan, a legislator who has called for a state monopoly on alcohol production to raise government revenue, said half of Mongolian adults drink too much.

"Mongolians are swimming in an ocean of vodka," the newspaper UB Post said in a recent article. "It destroys families, orphans children."

By 10:30 on a recent Friday night, the holding tank at Chingeltei District Police Station held 28 people in a room with cells, each locked with a shiny new padlock. A man in a heavy coat slept outside on the floor of a reception area.

One officer shoved a drunk hard as he led him to the cells. The man lost his unsteady footing on the slippery floor, slammed head first into a wood-paneled wall. Two other officers cuffed a drunk who was slow to undress in preparation for the cold shower sometimes given to sober people up.

Police who pick drunks up off the street probably save lives. Winter temperatures plunge below zero, and officers sometimes stumble across people who have frozen to death, the captain said.

"It's very cold. It's very risky for the drunks," he said.

In summer, drunk people sometimes fall into rivers and drown, Davaasuren added.

Part of the problem is bad alcohol. A genuine bottle of vodka costs the equivalent of \$2.40, while smuggled alcohol or moonshine sell for as little as 35 cents a bottle.

After police bring people in, a doctor checks to see how they are. Those at risk of alcohol poisoning, or injured from fights or frostbite, are taken to a hospital.

Those not considered a danger to themselves or others are allowed to go home if relatives pick them up. The rest are stripped and left in cells with a blanket and tea or juices until morning.

People used to drink under communism, too, Davaasuren said. But back then, police would phone the offices of people picked up, causing them to be demoted, lose pay or lose their jobs.

These days, police prefer to take people home if they are not too drunk, the captain said.

As he spoke, another officer phoned the parents of two men picked up after a bar owner called to complain.

"We were just drinking," one of the youths pleaded. "I'll call my home," he said. "I want to go home myself."

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INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Mongol Messenger

15-10-97

Survey indicates healthy media

COMMUNICATIONS

The results of Mongolia's first media survey were published this month by the Press Institute of Mongolia.

Financed by the Soros Foundation, the survey of 567 people from 19 aimags and cities was carried out by Erich Mustafa, a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) working at the institute.

Some 433 respondents (76.3 per cent) said that they read newspapers, but that after reading they passed the newspapers on to others.

The survey indicated that the most active reader age group was that of 31-40 year olds.

A total of 89 were listed by respondents in the survey and the daily Ardyn Erkh (People's Right) was the most popular.

The survey report emphasised that considering Mongolia's vast territory, poor infrastructure (transport and telecommunications), small population and scattered settlements, the fact that 395 people (91 per cent) of all newspaper readers read Ardyn Erkh consistently was "successful".

After Ardyn Erkh, the newspapers Zasgyn Gazryn Medee (Government News), Onoodor (Today), Nyam Garig (Sunday), and Nugel Buyan (Sin and Virtue) were listed.

The survey showed that television was more popular than radio, with 423 respondents (74.6 per

cent) stating that they watched television, at least one programme, every evening.

Some 26 per cent of those surveyed watched UBTV and local TV, 19.1 per cent watched Channel 25, 8.7 per cent watched Eagle TV, 14 per cent watched Sansar TV and other Cable channels.

The research indicated that urban Mongolians watched more television, while those in rural areas listened more to the radio.

Those between 31-40 years listened to Mongol Radio and those in the 21-30 age bracket listened to FM102.5 and JAAG radio.

About 83 per cent (288) of Mongolians surveyed daily radio listeners primarily listened to news.



Erich Mustafa

Mongol Messenger

24-02-99

New media law faces escalating criticism

By B. Indra

The January 1 law which freed all forms of media from state hands has been lauded as one of the great achievements of Mongolia's young democracy.

But its implementation process has been less than satisfactory, according to Ts. Dashdondov, the President of the Mongolian Free Democratic Journalists Association. He says the new media law is a shambles, both slow and ineffective.

"There is fighting between the old and new media systems," he says.

Dashdondov complains that journalists are not united -- the result of old communist party hacks at odds with a nascent army of young journalists following a new school of journalism.

Older media workers are trying to hold onto their old jobs, as well as their state status and monopoly. He notes that the past five years has shown improvements in media reform, but says an uphill battle still rages.

"There are a lot of enemies of the free media, some just can't progress. This proves how fragile our democracy is. I don't even know if this really is a democracy. And it is a shame that foreigners think we have a democracy. They believe the lies our leaders tell them," he says.

Dashdondov has also attacked the Parliament group working on the media, calling their work "unsatisfactory." To counteract this, he says, a temporary committee of media workers has been established. The committee has kept up a steady stream of letters to MP's, criticizing the media law and its implementation.

But not all is for the worse, Dashdondov lauds the recent decision to privatise both *Zuuny Medee* and *Undesnii Erkh*. 60 per cent of the papers will be sold at auction and 40 percent sold to the staff.

The two national papers have been a heavy source of controversy since January 1, when they were to be stripped of their government status. Private newspapers complained that the both papers maintained advantages. Some

fought Undesnii Erkh's attempt to hang onto the subscriber list of its predecessor *Ardyn Erkh*.

If the temporary committee determines that the law is not being followed strictly, it will choose an alternative form of protest, which it did not specify.

"There is no press freedom if journalists live in corruption, poverty or fear," said Dashdondov. "The free press cannot develop if the old newspapers keep their old structure."

"According to the Mongolian tradition, Mongolians never build a new ger on the basement of an old ger. The time of state monopoly newspapers is over and it is time for free press. Free media is not a gift that government gives. It can only be established with a hard fight. It will be a hard and long battle."





Internet-surfing Mongolians embrace new technology

ULAN BATOR, April 13 (AFP) - Mongolia is one of Asia's poorest countries, but it is embracing new technology with enthusiasm as Internet cafes spring up and personal computers arrive in some private homes.

Mongolia got its first Internet service provider, Datacom, in 1996 -- the same year it elected its first post-communist government. Since January, two new rivals have arrived on the scene.

"The level of computer knowledge in Mongolia is rising," said Dolgor Bat-Erdene, manager of the computer system for Mongol News Company, a news organization in the capital, Ulan Bator.

"There are more young people who can use the Internet and are getting access to information through this means."

That is good news for the Mongolian government, which hopes the country's youth -- 60 percent of the population is under 25 -- combined with a literacy rate of over 90 percent will prove the key to development.

Government officials speak of creating a nation of multilingual, sophisticated computer users, despite the country's plunging export earnings and decimated manufacturing sector.

The United Nations has even spoken of Mongolia emulating the "Irish miracle" -- in which an agricultural country bypasses industrialization to become a high-tech hotbed.

"Mongolians have a knack for learning things," said Atsushi Yamanaka, who works on an information technology project for the UN Development Programme.

"And information can be a shorter way to develop the country."

But there are formidable obstacles in the sparsely populated country amid a crumbling infrastructure as the authorities sink under mountains of debt.

So while MPs can now scan the Internet on their UN-funded computers -- the Playboy and CNN websites are the most popular in Government House, according to an informal survey -- and Mongols abroad can read Mongolian-language daily newspapers online, Mongolians outside the capital have to contend with patchy phone connections and fluctuating electrical supplies.

(See next page)



Agence France-Presse

13-04-98

Lack of money was identified by university students in a poll as the main barrier to access to information.

Internet centres cost more than two dollars an hour, while monthly subscription fees for e-mail range from 14 dollars to 75 dollars for an Internet connection.

And while Mongolian firms import brand-name computers, a stylish Toshiba notebook is out of reach for most people in a country where the average monthly household income is less than 60 dollars.

"The computer is a luxury item, a status symbol," said Bat-Erdene. "It's like a car, not everybody can buy one.

"Private company bosses all have personal computers, in their homes as well as their offices. It's just for show. They just play games on them. Sometimes they don't even know how to switch them on."

But many people remain optimistic about Mongolia's future in technology. This month, a British-Mongolian joint venture is launching the Khan, a desktop computer designed and assembled in Mongolia.

"We wanted to show that you can get things done in Mongolia," said Iain Barclay, the firm's marketing director. "We need to overcome the prejudice that some people have against products from here.

"Generally in Mongolia there's a big rise in technology that generates an interest in computers and develops the market. You can buy a lot more stuff here now, like laptops with DVD.

"The communications infrastructure in the countryside is improving. And there is all sorts of new technology coming to overcome limitations of distance and remoteness."

But if Mongolia is to compete in the rapidly changing high-tech world, it needs access to better computers and better training.

"At the moment we can produce people with the skills to operate computers," says Bat-Erdene. "But people who train on software need more practice in order to improve their knowledge."

The School of Computer Science, set up inside the former Construction College, sends a couple of instructors each year abroad on training courses paid for by the UN or the European Union.

Lecturer Yumbayar Namsrai admits they have a long way to go.

"We have no master's degree course, for example. But we made a new curriculum last year and tried to include all the modern subjects.

"The equipment in this school is better than in other universities, where the network and Internet connections are still not so good. All our students have network and Internet access, so it's a lot better than two or three years ago."

Previous Story: War on the web shadows conflict in the Balkans AFP

Next Story: It's Y2K crunch time in Australian stockmarket test AFP



Associated Press

30-01-99

Mongolia Unshackles State Media

By Michael Kohn

Associated Press Writer

Saturday, January 30, 1999; 1:36 a.m. EST

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia (AP) -- "Five Rings" covers sports. "Blue Spot" follows parliament. "Wolf" is full of sex stories. "Yesterday," "Today" and "The Day After Tomorrow" prefer straight news.

From newsstands, Mongolia's media looks as free as can be. But even more freedom is on the way.

A law enacted Jan. 1 aims to unshackle from government control those newspapers, radio and television stations and other media that aren't already in private hands.

The media law is regarded as one of the most important reforms in Mongolia's nine-year effort to dismantle its communist legacy and build a solid free-market democracy.

Already, communal livestock herds have been privatized and redistributed to hundreds of thousands of nomads who roam Mongolia's vast steppe. State-owned factories are being shut or sold off. A stock exchange overlooks the central square in the capital, Ulan Bator, where communist stalwarts once rallied.

Now change has come to media outlets that once were mouthpieces for communist officials. The new law bans state ownership of media and requires that newspapers be privatized. Emphasizing the break with the past, it also required them to change their names for at least five years.

Almost overnight after the law was enacted, one of the largest daily newspapers, "Government News," became "Century News," while "People's Right" became "National Right."

Government-owned television, radio and wire services will be pooled under a self-funding national public broadcasting system.

After street protests forced the then-communist government to introduce free elections in 1990, state media became freer. But supporters of the new law, passed in August by a parliament dominated by democratic reformers, said state media was still not free enough.

(See next page)



Associated Press

30-01-99

"Mass media should not be under any political pressure," said legislator Da. Ganbold. "After elections, leaders and directors of the state media are rehired to suit government needs. Politicizing increases and the official information often becomes distorted."

"Mongolians will have access to the most accurate news available," said another legislator, E. Bat Uul. "It will change their attitudes, philosophy and thinking."

Even with the new law, some say little has changed. Editorial staff and reporters were rehired with the same salaries. Century News was given a splash of color for a few days, then reverted to black and white. National Right looks the same as before.

"The only change I can see is the name. Our editorial staff and policies are the same," said National Right reporter O. Ariuntuya. "Maybe after privatization there will be a visible difference."

First, however, state media must find buyers. Newspapers are expected to be auctioned off within the next six months.

But the former state media in this country of 2.4 million people face a market crowded with publications -- most of them private -- that have sprung up in democracy's wake. Mongolia has a remarkable 648 registered newspapers and periodicals -- 1 for every 3,700 people -- although many published just one issue, folded and no longer operate.

In the battle for readers, magazines and newspapers with names like "Top Secret" and "Long Ear" have filled pages with gossip and scandal. Some publications carry racy pictures of scantily clad women.

One of the most famous newspapers, "Hot Blanket," was closed by the government in 1996 for printing illegal pornographic advertisements. With a circulation of 80,000, the newspaper, which came out every 10 days, was one of the most widely read.

Hot Blanket founder S. Bayarmonkh, a self-styled rebellious journalist known for scooping stories, has started a new newspaper.

"Alarm," which also comes out every 10 days, has 26,000 subscribers and sells 25,000 more copies at newsstands. The daily National Right, in contrast, has 15,000 subscribers and sells 3,000 copies on the street.

However, the National Right and other former state media are expected to win over readers who may eventually become disenchanted by the tabloids.

"They will make their money off their prestige and accurate reporting. There is no need for these papers to resort to scandalous press," said D. Undraa, an employee of the national news agency



NEWS FOCUS

MONGOLIA

Science Hopes to Rebound In Post-Cold War Era

Newly democratic, Mongolia hopes Western links will help it to overcome its isolation and regain its scientific prowess

ULAN BAATAR, MONGOLIA—A decade ago, this vast, isolated, and rugged country boasted a surprisingly strong research enterprise with 100 research institutes, 3000 researchers, and an annual influx of scientists from other parts of the East Bloc. "Our expertise and capacity was very high," says B. Chadraa, president of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and a Moscow-trained physicist. "We worked closely with Russia and [East] Germany." Mongolia's geography helped: The Soviets built a series of seismological stations to monitor nuclear tests across the border in China, and they funded operations at a hilltop of telescopes to observe U.S. spy satellites through Mongolia's clear skies. In addition, the dinosaur graveyards of the Gobi desert were a big draw for paleontologists.

But in 1991 Russia withdrew hundreds of thousands of its troops, and the generous subsidies for outside university education and research work disappeared. Today, the telescopes are shuttered by a lack of money for photographic plates, and the seismic stations are silent. So officials in this new democracy are looking West for help in building on modest initiatives in seismology and higher education and leveraging Mongolia's natural assets. Those efforts, the country's researchers note proudly, reach back 700 years, when Mongol emperor Kublai Khan organized the first international academy of sciences in Beijing.

But creating those links won't be easy for a country that largely banned Westerners for half a century. "The situation was very difficult," says Bazaryn Bekhtur, director of the Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics, sitting in the traditional round nomadic tent called a ger still favored by Mongolians. Bekhtur was visiting a group of Canadian astronomers camped out on a vast plain 50 miles south of the capital to monitor last fall's Leonid meteor shower. "We tried to set up some cooperation with Western countries,"

he says, "but they had no good information on Mongolian science and technology. And we had no good information on them." Communications were limited because the second language for most Mongolian researchers is Russian or German, not English.

The government reacted to the crisis caused by the abrupt loss of Soviet support by reducing the number of scientific institutes to 20, with 11 devoted to basic research in the physical, biological, and social sciences. And while government spending on science and technology has held fairly steady at almost \$3 million since 1991, the end of Soviet subsidies for oil and other essentials has triggered an inflationary spiral that has eaten heavily into purchasing power. "There is enough money to keep current programs going, but not

Natural advantages. Mongolia hopes a bank of telescopes outside the capital, the fossil-rich Gobi desert, and a pristine Lake Chovsgol will lure more Western scientists.



for anything new," says Chadraa. At least one-third of Mongolian researchers have abandoned science since the end of the Soviet era, he estimates. "The good people are leaving to go into business and politics," says Bekhtur mournfully.

Bekhtur's mountaintop institute, on the outskirts of the capital, once was a beehive of activity. Soviet intelligence services came for a firsthand look at U.S. spy satellites and clues to their intended targets, while scientists conducted regular astronomical research. Today, Bekhtur's annual budget of about \$75,000 has been only partially appropriated, and its bank of 10 telescopes, along with a large building for classrooms

and offices, is largely empty. Astronomer Bayaraa Togookhuu waits in vain for Western scientists to show interest in a finely crafted 20-inch Schmidt telescope once used for variable star research. "A few thousand dollars is all that is needed to upgrade it," says Martin Connors, an astronomer at Athabasca University in northern Alberta, Canada, who recently inspected the Schmidt telescope. The site's clear and dry air, its altitude and location on the opposite side of the globe from North America, and its political stability make it "potentially a good place for astronomy," adds Bill Chang, who handles Mongolian-related research at the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF).

The outlook appears slightly brighter for Mongolian geologists and geophysicists. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization in Vienna wants to place five seismic stations across Mongolia to keep a watch out for rogue nuclear tests. Chadraa says the \$1.6 million contract, still under negotiation, would provide the ability to detect any atmospheric explosions and to measure for airborne radioactivity. Although the stations are designed for minimal maintenance, meaning few jobs for Mongolian scientists, Chadraa hopes they will lead to increased contacts between Mongolian and Western researchers.

Another possibility for greater contact is further exploration of the country's recent seismic history. "There have been several earthquakes in the last 50 years near magnitude 8," says Jack Medlin, head of the Asian and Pacific geology section for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which has sponsored four expeditions. The pattern of inner-continental quakes resembles activity in the U.S. midsection, and Mongolian fault lines are often exposed rather than buried under layers of rock.

USGS also is working with Mongolia and several other Asian nations to analyze the continent's mineral deposits. The next step, says Medlin, would be for Mongolia to conduct its own mineral assessment and environmental survey, at a cost of several million dollars. A USGS team will return to Ulaan Baatar in late spring to discuss the plan, which would require outside funding. In the meantime, a number of U.S. scientists have received NSF money to work with their Mongolian counterparts on everything from dinosaur fossils and grassland ecology to the pristine depths of Lake Chovsgol. A proposal from the Mongolian government to set aside vast tracts of land for conservation purposes could provide additional research opportunities.

Such cooperative efforts can only do so

NEWS FOCUS

much to improve the country's science, however. In the long term, Mongolian administrators acknowledge that a better educated population will be essential. And that means supplementing the country's only major university. So in 1997 Chadraa converted a former Russian high-rise building into a campus, called the Ulaan Baatar University, that is run by the University of Colorado, Denver (UCD). The unusual arrangement, which UCD pioneered in Moscow and Beijing, gives the 60 Mongolian students now enrolled a chance to learn English, earn a U.S. degree, and apply for study in Denver or other U.S. universities. The academy and its U.S. partner share the cost of the \$4000 annual tuition. In addition, the Mongolian government

subsidizes 30 graduate students at Denver and at other U.S. universities.

Chadraa, who also holds the position of university rector, acknowledges that the UCD relationship is a gamble. "It's hard for us—the textbooks, the tuition are very expensive, and we have spent a lot of money developing this." But such a connection is a vital step toward raising a new generation of English-speaking researchers. For their part, UCD officials see the arrangement, which they hope will at least break even, as an opportunity to expand their presence in Asia.

Mongolia's efforts to build a peaceful democratic society and create a market economy win praise from foreigners, who contrast it with the chaos enveloping other parts of the

former Soviet Bloc. Nevertheless, day-to-day life remains bleak. "Mongolia is a small country, and there is little support for science," says one Mongolian researcher, noting that "science is at the bottom of the list" of programs funded by the country's Ministry of Enlightenment, which supports education, culture, and science. That is the harsh reality in a nation of few roads, schools, and exports, and whose airline is hard pressed to pay for maintenance on its single Airbus jet. But Mongolian researchers are betting they can extend the country's history of international contacts to bolster its scientific prowess.

—ANDREW LAWLER

Andrew Lawler is a staff writer on fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge.

Mongol Messenger

05-11-97

Information centres the key to local development

Information
and technology

History reveals that primitive men began to settle in Mongolia nearly 300,000 years ago. The term Mongol means "brave people" and their origin lies with the nomadic tribes.

Usually they loved to migrate from one place to another due to geographic and political reasons. Even today animal husbandry is the mainstay of the country.

The political history of Mongolia is full of adventures and stories of the rise and fall of different monasteries. In the third century BC the great Huns, whose huge empire extended from the Great Wall of China to Lake Baikal in the former Soviet Union.

During the period of Chingis Khan and his sons in the 13th century, the Mongol empire expanded from China to the Black Sea and included China, Russia, Iraq, Iran and some other countries. However due to several reasons over the next four centuries, the vast Mongol empire broke in to separate parts. Some of the reasons for this decline were lack of sound economic links, local politics and lack of proper communication.

During this period the Manchus (enemies of Mongols in China) were winning the wars and were able to send many Mongols home. So during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) China controlled Mongolia. After the great revolution in 1911 China became the Republic of China. Meanwhile Bogd

■ Citizens Information Services Centres have been opened in six aimags to enhance the capabilities of local communities. UNDP Local Governance Advisor **MAHINDA MORAGOLLE** tables the history leading to the birth of the public information project.

Khan declared Mongolia an independent country. The Russian revolution in 1917 greatly influenced Mongolians. In 1919 China invaded Mongolia and Bogd Khan asked for help from Russia and in 1921 Russian and Mongolian soldiers defeated Chinese forces.

In 1924 the Mongolian Peoples Republic (MPR) was declared. So for another 67 years, until 1990, the Socialist government (under Russian influence) continued.

Mongolia took its steps towards democracy in 1990. The Mongolian Government amended the constitution to permit multi party elections to be held in July 1990 due to the large pro democracy protests. However, communists won the election, securing 85 per cent of seats in the Parliament.

The Constitution was again amended and an election was held in June 1992 and the first non-communist government was established. In July 1996 a new Government took power with a strong platform for further decentralisation and strengthening local governance institutions.

So far the Government of Mongolia has kept its promise to build

a functioning market-based economy, liberalising domestic and international trade, freeing remaining price restrictions, introducing a floating exchange rate for the local currency and announcing privatisation programmes.

Since 1990, significant steps have been made towards establishing a stable democracy in Mongolia, including promulgation of a new Constitution, formation of a government following free and fair elections and commencement of administrative and economic reforms.

There has been, however, a significant reduction in the level and quality of public goods and services available to the people during the transition period.

The Government has undergone significant restructuring. Many functions, which were strictly controlled centrally, have now been decentralised to the territorial units. These units have little experience in public service delivery system design and management. They also do not have sufficient funds to operate effectively.

The Constitution of Mongolia has provided a governance system

based on democratic values and human rights and defines the nature of decentralisation and self-governance.

Within the framework of the Partnership for Progress between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Mongolian Government, the UNDP programme on Governance and Economic Transition the Decentralisation and Democracy is supporting the consolidation of democracy and decentralisation efforts of the Government. The primary focus of this project is to implement a participatory approach in local development management in six of the country's 21 aimags.

The success of Mongolia's full transition from a socialist system to a democratic market-based society, is mainly dependent on the people's participation in development activities. Therefore, building capacities in local civil society is one of the main objectives under this project. So the establishment of Citizens Information Service Centres (CISC) was given priority and these centres are now providing computer training, advisory services, opportunities for distance education and access to the Public Management Information System.

At present this project has been already introduced in Tov, Dundgobi, Hovd, Hovsgol, Ovorkhangai and Sukhbaatar aimags.



Mongolia Gets Its Own Media Mogul

July 7, 1998

MEDIA MARKETS

By Thomas Crampton International Herald Tribune

TERELJ, Mongolia - Since the time a spelling mistake almost landed him in prison, Ts. Baldorj's career as a newspaper journalist has improved considerably.

Within the last two years, Mr. Baldorj has borrowed enough money to build the country's largest media empire, encompassing five publications, including Onoodor, the first privately owned daily newspaper in Mongolia, as well as a radio and television station.

"He is our Mongolian Rupert Murdoch and could become prime minister if he really wanted, but I think he prefers to stay in the background, pulling strings," said D. Ariunbold, editor in chief of the Mongol Messenger, the state-owned rival of an English-language newspaper owned by Mr. Baldorj, The UB Post.

Despite keen capitalist instincts, the soft-spoken and bohemian-looking Mr. Baldorj - who, like other Mongolians, goes by his first name and the initials of his father's name because family names were banned by the Communists who formerly ruled the country - puts his moral and financial support behind the descendants of the Communists.

"The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party has more experience in governing and they are much more qualified than the current government," Mr. Baldorj said through an interpreter. "The party has changed; this name is just a hangover from the old days."

Mr. Baldorj, 45, is in some ways himself a hangover from the old regime, and critics say his party connections have been crucial for the fast growth of his business. It was under the Soviet-backed Communist government that Mr. Baldorj reached the top ranks of the state propaganda machine, becoming editor of the official daily newspaper, Ardyn Erkh.

But this job almost ended with his imprisonment. While working at the newspaper under tight deadline one evening Mr. Baldorj switched one letter in Mongolian, transforming "the Soviet premier" into "the Soviet complainer." Reading his mistake the next morning, he feared the worst.

At the time, the atmosphere of distrust was so strong that members of the state censorship committee censored one another and reporters were exiled to the Gobi Desert for minor infractions.

"I was very worried, but finally I did not go to prison for the spelling mistake," Mr. Baldorj said. "They just cut my salary by 25 percent for three months." The incident passed, but his career at the newspaper

ended in 1996 after the defeat of the Communists in Mongolia's second free elections.

Asserting a new editorial independence and the state-run newspaper to criticize the newly formed coalition government, Mr. Baldorj sparked an acrimonious national debate that ended with Parliament's voting to fire him. Half of the staff of the newspaper resigned in sympathy, joining Mr. Baldorj to start a new publication.

Few fault the editorial quality and independence of his publications, but Mr. Baldorj's critics say that only through his Communist connections could he have moved so quickly from editor to media baron.

"Maybe political connections have helped my business," Mr. Baldorj said. "But people say contradictory things about me because my business goes well."

He denied that he had any ambition to become prime minister but said he planned to take "a more active role in leadership" of the People's Revolutionary Party in the next election.

Onoodor claims a circulation of 10,000, about one-third of all daily newspapers sold in Mongolia, and Mr. Baldorj has expanded his media empire to encompass broadcasting as well as a stable of publications.

Financed largely through borrowing, Mr. Baldorj has a radio and television station as well as four weekly newspapers. One covers sports, two are for children and teenagers and the other is the English-language UB Post. Mr. Baldorj's publications are put together by 100 employees in two rooms using three phone lines and 12 computers.

Starting a publishing business was by no means a radical idea in post-Communist Mongolia. When censorship ended, Mongolia's highly educated, opinionated and well-read citizens began churning out new publications by the dozen.

From barely a handful of state-run newspapers under Communist rule, there are now more than 200 official registered titles. Many of the publications are tabloid in style and mentality. Titles include Top Secret, Disgusting and Hot Blanket.

Mr. Baldorj started Onoodor with financing of \$50,000 from an American business contact. His highly publicized confrontation with the government guaranteed good publicity when the first edition rolled off the press less than two months after he had lost his job at Ardyn Erkh.

"All 8,000 copies sold out in the first morning," Mr. Baldorj said. "The government's direction was still unclear and people wanted to know which way the wind would blow."



The UN's new online magazine. One a first for Mongolia.

Mongolia prepares for a magazine explosion

By Jill LAWLESS

Mongolian newsstands are bursting at the seams. But while the content of the country's publications is varied, their form is not. News rules this country's publishing industry. The few glossy magazines for sale are imports from Russia.

When the democratic revolution unleashed the tide of free expression in the early 1990s, a flood of newspapers poured forth. It made sense. The cheap-and-cheerful technology of newsprint is low-tech, accessible and inexpensive. Suddenly everyone could be a publisher.

But Mongolia's increasingly sophisticated media landscape is about to go glossy. Tomorrow (September 9) sees the launch of Ger (Home), Mongolia's first on-line magazine. A bilingual quarterly funded by the United Nations, it combines entertainment — articles on the changing sexual attitudes of young Mongolians and the country's vibrant pop scene — with information on the work of the UN and other NGOs in Mongolia.

"We want something that will tell the stories of Mongolians and their experiences over the last eight years — both to Mongolians and to the rest of the world," says David South, communications coordinator at the United Nations Development Programme.

This month also brings the premiere issue of Tusgal (Strike), billed as the first full-colour, general-interest magazine in the new Mongolia. Published by Mongol News Company — the privately owned media group whose stable of publications includes the daily newspaper Onodoo and The UB Post — it offers a lively mix of sport, culture and celebrity articles, also aimed primarily at the young.

These two publications are just the top of the stack. Mongolia's two best-known printing houses, Admon and Interpress, are said to be working on titles of their own.

Mongolia's quick-to-learn capitalists see a gap — and they want to fill it.

"In Mongolia there are many newspapers, but no world-class magazines," says Tusgal's editor-in-chief, Do. Tsendjav. "On the streets you can see a lot of publications that aren't exactly magazines but you can't call newspapers, either — newspapers that appear every 10 days or two weeks.

"We want to fill this space. We want to produce the first colour magazine that will reach world standards, something close to Time or Newsweek."

"There's an enormous thirst for quality journalism, quality

publications that are interesting to look at, top photojournalism — all the things newspapers don't cover," adds South. "We've seen newspapers moving to more colour, more photographs, and that shows a desire for quality."

That quality comes at a price. Tusgal, with 70 colour pages, will sell for between Tg 1500 and Tg 2000 — not much cheaper than an American publication like Time, and too expensive for many Mongolians.

With only 1000 Internet subscribers in Mongolia, Ger has an even smaller market within the country — though, South is quick to point out, the UN has established public-access Internet centres in Ulaanbaatar and several aimags.

And he says a print version is planned to follow.

"Distribution is the big problem right now," he says. "We have to see how we can organize distribution to reach the whole country. I know more magazines will be launched soon in Mongolia, and hope a distribution network may grow out of that."

The editors know Mongolia's magazine market and magazine technology are in their infancy. Although companies like Admon and Interpress get more sophisticated equipment by the month, the capacity to produce quality publications is still limited — the first issue of Tusgal has been printed outside Mongolia.

Human resources need to develop as well, Tsendjav admits.

"To produce a monthly magazine you need highly qualified journalists. We don't have that right now. We're still seeking them out."

But he is confident this will change — and quickly, too, if the pace of development in the past eight years is anything to go by.

"During socialism, Mongolia had many magazines, but it all stopped after 1990," notes Tsendjav. "It was a question of economics."

"At first we don't think we can earn money from this. If you want to make money you have to wait two or three years. So what we are aiming for at first is to build up a readership."

"I think in two or three years, living standards will improve. People will have more money to spend on things like magazines. But we don't want to wait for people to get enough money. We want to be the first, so people will develop an interest."

"There will be competition. Nowadays a lot of business-people understand the importance of the media. I welcome competition. It'll make us work harder. It's good for everybody."

Information called key to development

Once upon a time, there was a great empire, covering a third of the earth. It may sound like a fairy tale, but it's the true story of Mongolia in the 13th century.

Now, however, it's a different story. Mongolia today has weak industry and a weak economy.

According to World Bank figures, as much as 36 per cent of the population lives in poverty.

The solution to Mongolia's problems may lie in developing its intellect as much as its economy.

Wasn't it the intelligence of our ancestors that allowed them to build such a mighty empire 700 years ago? How else could such a small population - less than a million at the time - survive and thrive in a time of war and strife?

A United Nations Development Programme-backed project hopes to develop Mongolia's intellectual industries.

"Intelligence gives a country one more chance," says Atsushi Yamanaka, who works on UNDP's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) project.

"Mongolians in general are very well educated and intelligent.

"That can be a shorter way to develop the country. Building up any other production industry requires a lot of money. You may spend millions of dollars to start up automobile manufacturing.

For intellectual industries is information and communications.

But Mongolia's current information and communications systems are inadequate to meet the country's goals.

A survey of students from the Mongolian National University and Mongolian Technical University revealed that many - 80 per cent - do not believe all the information they get from newspapers, which they consider the main source of information in the country.

And they say access to computer technology is even worse. Many said they rarely go to Ulaanbaatar's two public-access computer centres to seek information from the Internet, because the Tg 3000 (U.S. \$3.40) fee is too high.

Datacom, currently Mongolia's only Internet service provider, offered free Internet access to universities for two years but stopped in 1998.

"Now there is a computer centre at the School of Computer Science and Management for all universities," says L. Baatarhuu of Datacom's Customer Service Centre.

But he admits one centre cannot possibly meet the demand, and he agrees that Internet fees are too high for many students.

"Monthly fees of between U.S. \$15 and U.S. \$75 are too much for Mongolians. But running such a service is very expensive."

Outside of Ulaanbaatar, computer access is all but impossible.

UNDP's ICT project aims to help meet Mongolia's thirst



The United Nations Development Programme thinks computers are key to Mongolia's future.

year ago in the Ulaanbaatar mayor's office remains little-known.

Similar centres have been set up in the capitals of Tov, Ovorkhangai, Khovsgol and Dundgov aimags, but Internet access outside the capital is sketchy at best.

"We want the centres to be real communications centres, with crowds of people freely exchanging information," says Yamanaka.

He says the centres supply newspapers, bulletin boards and magazines. "In the countryside, papers and other publications are always late. So at least the centres give people access to fresh news."

Another side of the project

So far, the CNN and Playboy websites have proved the most popular.

"The first stage of the project was to provide decision-makers with better communications and information systems," explains Yamanaka. "Now we are trying to touch the grassroots, the public."

In collaboration with the Soros Foundation, UNDP plans to provide rural secondary schools with computer facilities.

"Children must know what technology is, they should at least touch the computer keys," says Yamanaka.

Despite the challenges, he says he remains an optimist.

vast territory with such a scattered population. But I've found it's not so bad. Because people here have a talent for learning things.

"Once people are well aware of ICT - and, more importantly, if the government would focus on it - capacity can be built easily."

To this end, the Soros Foundation and the project are planning a national ICT Summit for 1999.

"The first step is to prepare

an ICT blueprint which reflects public opinion of how it should be in the country," notes Yamanaka. "Testing the opinions may take a long time. So the Summit might be in the summer."

Yamanaka says that the project is sowing the seeds of development, and hopes the results will be seen in 2010.

By then, products stamped with the words, "Copyright Mongolia" may be appearing on the world market.



Mongolians media-hungry, national survey reveals

Capitalism has spawned free-for-all in newspaper business

Mongolians are hungry for news, finds a study by the Press Institute of Mongolia. But while most appreciate the proliferation of newspapers, magazines and electronic-media outlets in the 1990s, a significant portion would prefer quality over quantity.

The first-ever Mongolian mass media survey polled 567 Mongolians from across the country on their reading, viewing and listening habits. The results show that Mongolians yearn for fast, accurate and factual news.

Newspapers are the staple source of information. Some 76.3 per cent of those polled said they read newspapers, 44 per cent of them on a daily basis. And 55 per cent of interviewees said papers were a source of useful information. Only 23 per cent expressed the same opinion of television, 17 per cent of radio.

The print media industry in Mongolia remains in a state of flux. The market economy has brought a flock of new newspapers to this

country - respondents identified a staggering 89. But only a few of these have established a solid reader base. The government newspaper *Ardyn Erkh* remains far and away the most popular - 91 per cent of readers look at it - followed by *Zasgiin Gazriin Medee* and *Onodoor*.

But more than one third of the newspaper readers surveyed - 37.5 per cent - said they would prefer to have fewer publications of higher quality. This stands in contrast to radio and TV, where a large majority expressed a desire for greater choice.

Nearly all the respondents admitted to watching television; 74.6 said they tune in everyday. Radio is less popular, with 67 per cent of those polled saying they are daily listeners.

News is the main reason people turn on the television, and the state broadcaster is easily the most popular outlet in both radio and TV. All the daily television watchers admitted to tuning into the state station at some point in the day. Its newscast, watched by a majority of all respondents, is

especially popular. Local television has some way to go to catch up. UB TV and local aimag stations are watched by only 29 per cent of daily viewers, while 19.1 per cent tune into Channel 25 and 8.7 per cent to Eagle TV. This suggests that, for all its flash, Eagle TV has not found a solid audience for its sports-dominated programming.

State radio also tops the list, thanks in large part to its countrywide broadcast reach, followed by UB Radio and Blue Sky Radio. There's a generational divide, though, with under-30s favouring the pop-music dominated 102.5 FM.

Among the report's other findings, four respondents complained of gossip being printed as news, while four others thought there was too much pornography in the media.

Access to the media remains an important issue, especially in rural areas. One respondent said airplanes should drop newspapers and magazines as they fly over aimags.

Another suggested journalists be sent to war zones so they could learn how to report.



Journalists seek access to information

Ensuring the free flow of information was the topic of a meeting of journalists and Members of Parliament organized by the Mongolian Journalists' Association and the Press Institute of Mongolia last week.

Mongolia's new press freedom law — which comes into effect January 1 — stresses that the public should have access to official information.

But it does not create a legal mechanism compelling

government and state institutions to convey such information to the media — and this has many journalists worried.

At present, independent media outlets complain that official information is given only to the government press.

"Even though it is stipulated in the Mongolian Constitution that citizens have a right to seek and obtain information, the responsibility to distribute information is not included in the law," charged G. Akim, editor of the newspaper *Il Tovchoo*.

The sympathetic MPs in attendance promised to take up reporters' concerns. Both B. Delgermaa and J. Byambadorj voiced support for greater legal safeguards for journalists.

Byambadorj said the power to censure and shut down the media should rest

with the courts, not the Ministry of Justice.

And he said the state had a duty to distribute all information not classed as secret.

Delgermaa went even farther, saying journalists should be free to publish any information they obtained from official sources.

"The people charged with protecting 'secret' information should be held responsible in cases where such information is published," she said.

The long-awaited press law, which bans censorship and calls for the privatization of the state-owned media, has been seen by journalists as praiseworthy but vague.

A parliamentary working group is in the process of working out how it will be implemented.

UB Post

05-05-98

Journos yearn to be free

By Ch. BAZAR, Press Institute of Mongolia

Mongolian journalists want a free press — but there's no consensus on how best to achieve it, according to a survey by the Press Institute of Mongolia and the United Nations Development Programme's Democracy and Journalism project.

The survey polled politicians, journalists and consumers of the media between February and April of this year on the state of press freedom in Mongolia.

A legal framework for media freedom was supported by 57.81 per cent of 64 journalists who participated in the survey. 53.13 per cent supported financial independence for the media, 51.56 per cent favoured banishing media monopolies, 42.19 per cent wanted media privatization, 42.19 sought greater public access to information and 40.63 per cent favoured prohibiting all forms of censorship.

Mongolia's constitution guarantees the right to express opinions and to publish, seek and obtain information. But the poll indicates journalists feel there are real obstacles to enjoying these rights.

The main barriers are financial dependence, cited by 65.63 per cent of respondents, dependence on the state by the major media outlets (60.94 per cent), moral failure of journalists (46.86 per cent) and lack of courage on the part of journalists (46.88 per cent).

Participants were frank in accepting that poor financial conditions prevent them from being the "voice of truth." And many pointed to government agencies' practice of distinguishing between state and independent media as a bar to reporting accurate information. The resulting inaccuracy harms the public reputation of the new-born independent media.

In all, 46.88 per cent believe state officials provide obstacles to journalists obtaining information, while 68.75 per cent think government officials should be legally required to provide the media with information.

UB Post

03-06-98

Public mistrusts journalists: survey

Readers like newspapers but don't trust them, according to a recent survey by the Press Institute of Mongolia.

The poll, designed to gauge public attitudes to press freedom as the government prepares to debate a new media law, surveyed 161 media consumers, as well as groups of politicians and journalists.

More than two thirds of consumers, 68.32 per cent, said they rely on newspapers for daily information, while 93.17 per cent cited TV as a source of everyday news.

But fewer than one in 10 consumers – only 13 of 161 – thought newspapers publish realistic information.

They cited a number of reasons for this, the top ones being journalists' lack of sensitivity to consumers' desires (43.48 per cent), unwillingness of government officials to give information to journalists (41.61 per cent) and the media's dependence on the government and the state (36.02 per cent).

Some 60.87 per cent of readers felt that not checking the authenticity of information was the chief quality a journalist should avoid, followed by violating people's privacy and reputations (54.66 per cent).

Most respondents – 60 per

cent – said press freedom in Mongolia was at an initial stage, while only 10 per cent thought it was fully guaranteed.

And a majority of consumers – 96 out of 161 – felt legal regulation was needed to enshrine press freedom. But only 19 newspaper readers supported privatizing the state-owned media as a solution.

Indeed, 76.4 per cent of consumers felt the state should have its own media.

The largest group of media consumers, 67.08 per cent, thought a media law should enshrine open access to information.

The Press Institute hopes the survey will influence lawmakers.

"Neither consumers nor journalists can fully enjoy their constitutional rights to obtain, search, find information, to speak and publish," conclude the pollsters.

"Their rights are violated.

"It's high time for a law aimed at regulation of issues like status of press and media outlets, their independence, freedom and journalists' rights, obligations (and) responsibilities."

The report refrains from outlining what form that law should take.

Mongol Messenger

17-12-97

Internet centres launched

TECHNOLOGY

Free walk-in Internet centres officially opened in Ulaanbaatar and Tov Aimag last week.

Funded by the Mongolian Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the new Citizen Information Service Centres (CISC) use the latest in information technology to bring Mongolians closer to the vast range of information available on the Internet.

The computers are also linked to the Mongolian Government's online database and offer public email boxes to send messages between centres throughout Mongolia.

The Ulaanbaatar centres are located at Sukhbaatar Square (the former AGFA film developing shop located in the Ulaanbaatar mayoral office), and in Zunmod at the Tov Aimag governor's office.

A further six centre are expected to be operational by the end of 1998.

In addition, the UNDP launched its English language homepage earlier this month - <http://www.un-mongolia.mn>. A homepage in Mongolian language will be available next month.

Information
and technology

UB Post

16-03-99

Internet cafes brew change in Mongolia



By JILL LAWLESS

Wake up and smell the coffee, Ulaanbaatar – the Internet cafe has arrived in Mongolia.

While that may be nothing new in many developed coun-

tries, it's a major event in Mongolia, which joined the Internet revolution only three years ago.

In 1996, Datacom, the country's first Internet service provider, gave Mongolians the chance to ride the information superhighway. Aid agencies like the United Nations and the Soros Foundation soon stepped in to help get government offices and NGOs online.

Despite myriad technical problems – the result of everything from Mongolia's creaky telecommunications infrastruc-

ture to its unforgiving climate – Mongolians are logging on in ever-greater numbers.

And it's getting easier for them to do so.

Datacom's Maginet system now faces competition from the Bodi Computer-run Mongolnet and a third provider, Micom, owned by Mongolian Telecom.

The result, most observers agree, will be lower rates and better service.

And more and more public-access Internet centres are springing up in Ulaanbaatar.

One of the first, the Unicom centre in the Ulaanbaatar Bank building, provides Internet access for Tg 2100 an hour. It has friendly and efficient staff but is sadly lacking in atmosphere – and, at most times, heat.

But several brand-new Internet cafes allow Ulaanbaatarites the chance to sip while they surf.

Datacom's new cafe, in the Centre for Scientific and Technological Information – steps away from the National and Technical universities – offers

Internet access for Tg 2400 an hour, and boasts longer opening hours (9 am to 9 p.m. on weekdays) than most of the other centres. Tea and coffee are available in the bright but rather spartan room.

For atmosphere, check out the slightly pricier (Tg 2500 an hour) Bodi-run cafe on Seoul Street, west of the State Circus. Bright primary-colour art, stripped wood and the chance to down a glass of beer or wine as well as coffee give it the atmospheric edge over its competitors.

By CHAN LEE MENG

WITH its inhospitable terrain, scattered population, underdeveloped communications network, and isolation from other countries, Mongolia is hardly associated with the Internet and technological development.

But Mongolia is well aware of the importance of the Internet and Information Technology, and the government is planning various IT initiatives, said Surenguin Badral, foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister of Mongolia.

The government hopes that IT will help Mongolia get past its isolation from other countries and improve communications between its own citizens.

As with most countries in the region, Mongolia's IT development is concentrated in major cities. Badral said the government is trying to increase IT development in rural areas.

"We also want to increase contact with other countries and share our experiences with each other," he said.

Mongolia is located in Northern Asia, and is landlocked between China and Russia (see map).

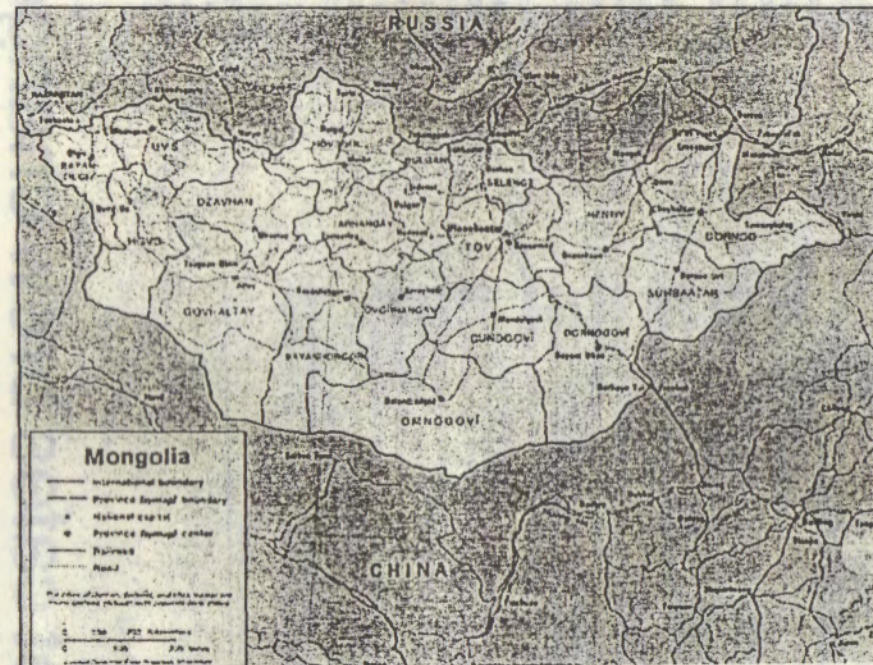
The country is composed of vast semi-desert and desert plains, and has mountains in the west and south-west, and the Gobi Desert in the south-east.

Although Mongolia has an area of 1,565,000sq km (nearly five times the area of Malaysia), it has a population of only 2.36 million.

With fewer than two persons per square kilometre, Mongolia is among the most sparsely populated countries in the world. In contrast, Malaysia has a popula-

Unique challenges for IT in Mongolia

Government to learn from Malaysia's IT initiatives



Map courtesy of the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection (www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html)

Internet connectivity and expansion of IT development to rural areas.

However, APDIP usually contributes technical expertise and not hardware, according to Grimmett.

Grimmett also notes that countries like Malaysia do not really need the help of APDIP because of the government's involvement in IT development.

"Malaysia is practically self-sufficient when it comes to IT, mainly because of its Multimedia Super Corridor projects and foreign investments," he said.

APDIP has a close relationship with the Malaysian government, and sometimes draws on the country's technical knowledge and experience with IT initiatives, Grimmett said.

APDIP, based in Kuala Lumpur and covering 42 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, promotes the use of IT to foster social and economic development.

For more information, contact APDIP at (03) 255-9122, by fax at (03) 253-9740 or visit its website at www.mys.undp.org/apdip/.

tion density of about 61 persons per sq km.

Another major challenge is close to half the population in Mongolia is nomadic, according to Badral.

"Because of these geographic and societal conditions, it is not economically feasible to lay land lines," he said.

Therefore, Mongolia is looking into satellite and wireless technology to get past these hurdles. Some nomads already have the technology to receive satellite signals, Badral said. "A fair number of nomads already carry satellite dishes with them so they can watch TV," he said.

Internet growth in Mongolia has also been slowed because there is a telecom-

munications monopoly, and the country has only one ISP, according to Badral. "We're looking into deregulation and opening up the market," he said.

Learning from Malaysia

Mongolia can learn from Malaysia's IT initiatives and use some ideas for its own national IT programme, said representatives from the Mongolian government.

Badral and other Mongolian representatives were recently in Malaysia to attend an IT seminar organised by the Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP).

APDIP is developed and funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is aimed at promoting sustainable human development by improving access to information.

Badral was impressed by the Malaysian government's IT initiatives and said Mongolia could adapt some of the ideas for its own purposes.

"By learning from Malaysia's experiences we hope to leapfrog other countries in terms of technology," he said.

Badral and other government representatives are part of a working group advising the Mongolian government on assessment, policies and implementation of IT strategies.

The working group may lead to the formation of a national IT council for Mongolia, similar to Malaysia's National Information Technology Council (NITC), Badral said.

Badral was accompanied by six other government representatives and one rep-

resentative from the private sector, for the seminar. The seminar was held from March 23-26 at Wisma UN and the delegates heard presentations from Mimos, MDC, and various other companies.

They were briefed on a variety of Internet-related topics including Internet architecture, relations, and other issues.

Badral said the Mongolian government is very interested in the various IT initiatives in this region. "We're looking into the IT initiatives of various countries in this region so we can learn from their experiences, avoid mistakes, and also save cost and time," he said.

APDIP aid

Gabriel Accascina, Programme Manager for APDIP, said the seminar is the first of a series tailored for government officials in developing countries who need to design and implement IT policies.

"We provide information that will enable them to plan, at an early stage, on how their country will participate in the global dialogue through IT," he said.

APDIP's aid can help countries maximise resources, decrease expenditure and obtain optimal results in a shorter time, according to Accascina.

Patrick Grimmellet, programme advisor for APDIP said the programme also helps less-developed countries with

Mongolia on the Net

Mongolia-related links at Yahoo
www.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/Mongolia/

Ministry of External Relations of Mongolia
www.mongoliaonline.mn/mer/

National Geographic information about Mongolia
www.nationalgeographic.com/resources/ngo/maps/atlas/asia/mongol.html

Mongolia Resource Page
www.soros.org/mongolia.html

Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP)
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THE OLD AND THE NEW - Despite clinging to ancient traditions like horsemanship and seasonal migration, nomadic Mongolians are gradually accepting modern technologies such as vehicles and computers.

Information
and technology



HIV/AIDS/STDs

UB Post

28-10-97

Philippine conference tackles Asia's AIDS crisis

Mongolians attend for the first time

By David SOUTH in Manila

More than 2,500 delegates have gathered in the steamy hot Philippine capital to renew the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Working up a sweat alongside other participants at the Fourth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific are nine Mongolians — a first that isn't going unnoticed.

The Congress opened Saturday (October 25) to the pounding beat of a theme song performed by teenagers, championing defiance of death and celebration of life.

That tone of hope was echoed by Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. He said the epidemic can be slowed down with the right public health measures — a positive message for Mongolia as it grapples with an STD crisis that many believe leaves the country at risk of an HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The magnitude of that epidemic outside Mongolia is startling. Around the world, 23 million people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Between 5 and 7 million of them live in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The point is that prevention is feasible," Piot told the Congress. "The results can be seen in those countries in the Asia-Pacific region where the epidemic has stalled or is in retreat.

"A good indicator for

unsafe sexual behaviour is the STD rate. I am impressed at the sustained decline in STD rates in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand over the past decade.

"But I am concerned actual declines in HIV in this region have occurred only in Australia, New Zealand and Thailand."

The countries to Mongolia's immediate south and north are experiencing exploding health crises. In China, HIV/AIDS is increasing at a rapid rate due to factors including growing prostitution, drug use and travel — all byproducts of a booming economy. The infected population is estimated at 400,000 and is expected to reach 1.2 million by the year 2000, according to China's national AIDS committee.

To the north in Russia, a complete collapse in the public health system has dramatically slashed life expectancy and led to an upsurge in many diseases, including tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

With many Mongolians doing business in both these countries, there are numerous opportunities for AIDS to enter the country.

A wide range of topics is under discussion at the gathering, with women, youth and STD-control measures of particular interest to the Mongolian delegates.

For the Mongolians, the Congress is an opportunity to learn from other countries' successes and failures in the fight against AIDS.

Mongolia's nine-member delegation includes four doctors — Dr. K. Davaajav, head of the AIDS/STD Department of

the Research Centre for Infectious Diseases, Health Ministry representative Dr. S. Enkhbat, Medical University director Dr. Lkhagvasuren and Dr. Darisuren from the United Nations Population Fund.

Also in the team are Democrat MPs B. Delgermaa and Saikhanbileg, UNICEF's B. Bayarmaa and two representatives from women's NGOs: S. Tsengelmaa from the Women's Information and Research Centre and N. Chinchuluun, executive director of the Mongolian Women Lawyers Association.

On Sunday, several presentations focused on the difficulties of getting people to use condoms.

In Fiji, studies found the majority of the population was aware of AIDS and had access to condoms, but still chose not to use them.

Lisa Enriquez, a Filipino woman who is HIV-positive, gave a sobering speech on the epidemic.

"One of the most important things I've learned from this epidemic is human nature. AIDS is such a humanizing disease. It reminds us of being human, complete with all the weaknesses and imperfections of being human.

Let us not kid ourselves; changing behaviour is not easy. One doesn't change because somebody tells him or her to do so.

"We will need to get our act together, institutionalize our efforts and continue working harder with passion and perseverance."

The Congress continues until October 30.

Conference says Mongolia can't ignore AIDS

Nation poised between crisis and opportunity, delegates hear

By A. DELGERMAA
with files from David
SOUTH in Manila

The Mongolian delegates to the Fourth International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific who met reporters at Ulaanbaatar's Buyant-Ukhaa airport on October 31 carried the message that this country can no longer afford to ignore the global AIDS crisis.

Each day, about 8500 people around the world become infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Mongolia's first participation in the biennial congress — held October 25 to 29 in the Philippine capital of Manila — comes at a time when the country is on a knife-edge. There's still a low rate of HIV infection in this country, and Mongolia has a chance to prevent its spread. But without quick and effective action, AIDS cases could explode within a very short time.

That's the case in neighbouring Russia, where a collapse in public health and living standards has sent infection rates skyrocketing. China, to Mongolia's south, is also seeing a sharp increase in AIDS cases.

Mongolia has only one identified AIDS patient, but delegates stressed the country needs to take action to tackle the disease. What once seemed to be a concern only for medical organizations is now a nationwide — indeed,



Delegates (l-r) Davaajav, Darisuuren, Delgermaa and Enkhbat meet the press in Manila.

worldwide — problem that affects young and old alike.

"We must show Mongolians that HIV is not very far from them," says Dr. Altunchimeg, one of nine Mongolian delegates to the congress. "We have to say AIDS is an international problem because of tourism, migration for work and business. All of this places us at risk to get infection."

S. Tsengelmaa of Ulaanbaatar's Women's Information and Research Centre, agrees Mongolians can't be complacent about AIDS.

"So many Mongolians go abroad for illegal work," she says. "In Seoul all the Mongolians go to the

brothels. This means there should be prevention for all the public, not just for women and sex workers."

In June, Mongolia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNAIDS, the United Nations AIDS body, outlining a two-year programme to combat HIV and AIDS.

At Government House on Wednesday (November 5), Mongolian delegates will release a 10-point manifesto outlining their response to the AIDS crisis.

Although the conference addressed advances in diagnosis and treatment, the focus remains on prevention.

One theme raised

again and again at the Congress was the difficulty in changing people's behaviour.

Altunchimeg recently completed a two-month study of sex workers in the Manila red-light district of Cavite City, which found that most didn't use condoms, despite their availability and public health campaigns.

It's like telling people to stop smoking because it is bad for them — wherever pleasure conflicts with good sense, pleasure wins out.

"Condom use is not such an acceptable method," says Altunchimeg. "In reality, they are often not used. My study has shown

condom use as almost zero for sex workers in Cavite City. The main obstacle is always men — women want condoms but men reject it. It doesn't satisfy them."

American researcher K. Mayer from Brown University felt the best weapon would be a topical microbicide — a cream that is used in the vagina to kill off the HIV virus.

The congress stressed the importance of educating the young. Mongolia, which has so far been spared the brunt of the AIDS crisis, still has a long way to go. Mongolia has no tradition of talking about sex to youth, but there's now a feeling that

it's time to open up this closed topic.

And amid the tensions of Mongolia's economic and social transition, prostitution is burgeoning. The congress heard that lack of government attention to health care, especially among this vulnerable sector of the population, has left many developing countries with little chance to control the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Mongolian delegates heard that recent moves to mandatory testing are not such a good idea.

The Asia-Pacific country that has had the most success slowing down the AIDS epidemic is Australia. It's also home to some of the strongest supporters of human rights. Outspoken Australian High Court Justice Michael Kirby is one of them.

"Paradoxically enough, the only way we will deal effectively with the problem of the rapid spread of this epidemic in our region is by respecting and protecting the human rights of those who are already exposed to the virus and those most at risk."

Altunchimeg agrees that Mongolia will be making a big mistake if it uses health measures that violate human rights.

"If Mongolia intends to do any mandatory testing, they won't get any funding from international organizations," she says bluntly.

HIV/AIDS/STDs

Northeast Asian conference vows regional cooperation on HIV and AIDS

One hundred Mongolians may be infected with the AIDS virus. That figure — far more than the single case identified to date — was the estimate of the World Health Organization during a conference on HIV and AIDS in Northeast Asia held last week in Ulaanbaatar.

The three-day meeting, which drew delegates from Mongolia, China and South Korea, was designed to craft a regional response to the epidemic.

The countries have many features in common, as well as close ties. Many Mongolians travel to both China and South Korea for trade or work.

"In China, Mongolia and

South Korea, there are rapidly rising numbers of sexually transmitted diseases," said Bruce Parnell, an adviser at Australia's Macfarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research.

"If people already have a sexually transmitted disease, it makes it much easier for the HIV virus to pass.

"So the chance of HIV spreading quickly once it enters these countries is very high."

That makes effective AIDS education and prevention in these countries especially urgent, experts say.

"It's hard to get people to do much about an epidemic before it's visible," noted Parnell. "But once it

is visible, it's too late."

There are indicators that governments in the region are waking up to the reality that AIDS can happen here.

As recently as 1990, China denied it had an AIDS epidemic. Last week, authorities more than doubled their estimate of the number of HIV cases in the country, to 200,000.

"Leaders in all three countries are committed to doing something about AIDS," said Parnell. "That's not the case in many countries."

In Mongolia, where only one AIDS case has been identified, the true reach of the disease is unknown. But here, too the government is taking more

notice. Last month it established a high-profile National AIDS Committee, headed by the Prime Minister.

Conference participants stressed that Mongolia, which has been spared much of the brunt of the worldwide AIDS epidemic, has an almost unique chance to stop the disease from spreading.

But that desire has led to calls among health authorities for mandatory testing as a way of identifying those who carry the virus. Some mandatory testing was carried out on women in Ulaanbaatar last month.

Parnell said the conference contained some "minor discussion" of

mandatory testing. He said both South Korea and China had abandoned widespread mandatory testing though it is still employed in China in some circumstances."

"The central policy in China is not to do mandatory testing," noted Tim Mackay, regional manager of the HIV and Development project of the United Nations Development Programme.

Knowledge is power, stressed Parnell, who encouraged "activities to re-establish a surveillance system in Mongolia. But we don't want to encourage governments to force people to be tested."

Mandatory testing is ineffective, expensive and

instills fear, he said.

"Testing doesn't change behavior."

The Ulaanbaatar meeting discussed a three-year regional action plan against HIV and AIDS. The inter-country project, which has its headquarters in Mongolia, is funded by \$400,000 from UNDP.

The conference's suggestions, which focus on involving a wide variety of government sectors and NGOs in the fight against AIDS, must be approved by all three governments. Tentative approval is already in place.

"It's likely approval will take place by the end of the year," said Parnell.

AIDS scare brings reality of epidemic home to Mongolians

Health officials and ordinary Mongolians are facing up to the reality of the global AIDS epidemic this week with the news that an HIV-positive Cameroon man may have had sex with several Ulaanbaatar prostitutes.

Since 1992, officials have trumpeted the statistic that there is only one registered AIDS case in the country. But international organizations have sounded a warning that the country is not isolated and cannot be complacent.

This autumn the World Health Organization estimated the true number of cases might be 100. And at the Fourth International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Manila in October, Mongolian delegates were warned that with skyrocketing HIV-infection rates in neighbouring Russia and China and a high incidence of STDs in this country, Mongolia must take

prevention seriously.

Now the risk of the disease is being brought home forcefully.

A round-up of Ulaanbaatar prostitutes last week revealed four women who claimed to have had sex with a Cameroon man who has tested positive for HIV. According to the women's evidence, they subsequently had sex with 56 men, from both Ulaanbaatar and the countryside.

The women are being treated in the Infectious Diseases Hospital for a variety of STDs. The results of their HIV tests have not been released.

The news has led to a rush of people wanting to be tested for HIV.

"The Centre normally tests about 40 people a day, but this number has increased," says Kh. Davaajav, director of the STD Care Centre of the Centre for Infectious Diseases. "We've had as many as 160 people

a day and have had to extend our hours.

"People are coming to the centre voluntarily," he stresses, saying the Centre will focus on educating the public and distributing condoms to high-risk groups. "We want to prevent the spread of the virus and make people recognize the danger."

He says the Centre will demand the government bring in a law about those who knowingly pass the AIDS virus to others.

The infected man is one of two Cameroon citizens serving jailed after attempting to bilk an Ulaanbaatar moneychanger of U.S. \$30,000 last month. He is being kept in solitary confinement in Gants Khudag prison.

An inspection of 66 hospitals by the Infectious Diseases Research Centre on December 25 and 26 revealed that many did not meet adequate standards of hygiene and sanitation.



AIDS Centre's Kh. Davaajav: worried.

The Health and Social Security Ministry has issued a decree ordering all hospitals to use only disposable syringes from January 1.

The move will be financed out of local district

budgets.

All the syringes at Gants Khudag prison were destroyed after reports the Cameroon man had received shots of antibiotics.



UB Post

05-11-97

Lamas against AIDS

By David South

Since HIV is contracted primarily through sex, the disease has always been a difficult subject for the world's religious leaders. When there is sex to be discussed, no religion can do it without bringing up morality.

This moral debate about bedroom behaviour has tainted discussion of AIDS in many countries. At the extreme end of the spectrum, some evangelical Christian leaders in the U.S. have painted AIDS as an apocalyptic disinfectant for humanity.

Not surprisingly, this attitude has not helped in educating the faithful that AIDS can happen to anyone and its victims should be treated like any other ill person.

The Philippine conference heard that the standoff between the world's religious leaders and public health authorities must stop. Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS, pointed to the numerous delegates from the world's religions and called on others to follow their example.

"In Myanmar, the Myanmar Council of Churches, the YWCA and other community based organizations have joined hands with local authorities, health workers and Buddhist groups for community-based prevention, care and support programmes," he told the assembly.

"This is the best practice in action."

Mongolian delegate Dr. Altunchimeg thinks a similar approach could work in this country.

"Now every Mongolian goes to see lamas. It's a good channel to advocate for AIDS education. In Thailand, lamas are very experienced at

this. People believe in lamas."

Like their colleagues in Thailand and Myanmar, Cambodian lamas have been in the forefront of AIDS education.

Lamas there use festivals and ceremonies to raise the issue.

You Chan, a 30-year-old lama from Tol Sophea Khoun monastery in Phnom Penh, likes to raise the issue delicately, by referring to diseases in Buddha's time.

"I feel it is difficult to speak about sexual methods with a large audience - I will not speak to sexual methods."

"At first, it was very



difficult. People would ask why a monk would say such things. But I tried and tried and the people understood who is helping them."

"My message to Mongolia's lamas is this: you have a moral responsibility to educate the people about AIDS, that it is happening all around the world and there is no medicine to cure it."

"You have to take care in the name of Buddhism to help people in this world."

You Chan teaches lamas at 15 temples in Cambodia, who pass the message along to other lamas and congregations.

Mongol Messenger

22-10-97

City extends STD/HIV testing

by D. Narantuya

About 50 per cent of residents of Ulaanbaatar between the ages of 15 and 40 years underwent testing for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) in Ulaanbaatar during the first two weeks of October, according to Ulaanbaatar City health officer, Y. Terbish.

Mr Terbish said the testing programme would be extended until the end of the month to cater for those who "missed out" initially.

He said the final results of testing would not be available until 1, November.

A mayoral decree issued in July stated that all Ulaanbaatar residents between 15 and 40 years had to submit to compulsory STD and HIV testing during a campaign from October 1-14. But according to the Mongolian Health Ministry, the testing programme would be carried out in all aimags and was not compulsory.

However, the entrance to several city health centres contained notices warning residents that they would be forced to undergo testing if they did not come voluntarily.

Mr Terbish said these notices were "a mistake" and such threats should not be made publicly.

At a press conference last week, *The Mongol Messenger* questioned Mr Terbish about the number of secondary school students involved in the testing programme, but he refused to comment.

According to H. Davaajav, director of the Mongolian AIDS Prevention Centre, about 80 per cent of the population used to be involved in STD testing.

"Since 1990, this testing has ceased and there has been an increase in the number of unemployed and alcoholics, which in turn has caused an increase in STDs," Mr Davaajav said.

"Mongolia's first and only person with HIV was discovered in 1992, and since that time the centre has tested 183,000 Mongolians."

"The centre tests are completely confidential and purely on a voluntary basis."

"In addition, blood donors, prostitutes, people with STDs, and those going abroad must undergo an HIV test."

In a bid to curb the spread of STDs, the Mongolian Government is cooperating with UNAIDS.

This week visiting UNAIDS consultant, Astrid Richardson, discussed ways of publicising ways to stop STDs and HIV.



UN jump starts National Strategy on AIDS project

By D. Narantuya

Mongolia's national strategy on STD, HIV, and AIDS project has been completed, announced the working group which initiated it.

"The strategy has an aim to organise lectures, create propaganda to change the behaviour of the public as well as the target group," said United Nations AIDS programme worker Nicholas Bates.

The national strategy intends to unify organisations dealing in STD, HIV, and AIDS. The strategy will also train NGO and hospital staff and promote awareness nationwide. It is conducted by the Mongolian government, the UN, international and domestic organisations, and the media. UNAIDS has already created 11 mini-projects for local NGO's.

"We are encouraged by the growing number of NGO's, and the direction they are headed. However, we believe more local research should be conducted, rather than just translating foreign literature. We also hope to improve ties between NGO's, which for the most part work independently," said strategy advisor Sharon Cohen.

The plan foresees more than

ten seminars to be held over the following three years. G. Dulamsuren, the working group's national coordinator indicates that the first level 'Information Education Course Forum' on STDs, HIV, AIDS, terminology workshop and rapid assessment workshop will be organised by next October. The second level activities will include Message Development Workshop, Materials Development Workshop, Pretesting workshop, and Mass Media IEC Workshop.

Commercial sex workers, young adults, STD patients, truck drivers, traders, businessmen, travellers, railway workers, and street children are the chosen target group.

Condom marketing is another crucial element. "There is no research about this in Mongolia. Distributing condoms to the public and providing information about them is a complex yet necessary issue," said S. Enkhjargal, coordinator of UNAIDS.

The world agrees that taking precautions is the most qualified method to stop spread of AIDS. With the support of UN organisations, the Mongolian government has begun an ambitious project to fight the spread of AIDS. Mongolia has officially registered two HIV positive patients - The first in 1992 and the second 1997.



At last, Mongolia puts AIDS on the front burner

Starting today (Tuesday, November 11), Mongolia plays host to a regional workshop on HIV and AIDS for North-east Asian nations. The three-day meeting in Ulaanbaatar is a small-scale but significant event — a signal that the fight against the disease is about to take on a much higher profile in this country.

In the wake of the nation's first-ever participation in the biennial Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific — held last month in the Philippine capital of Manila — delegates from government and non-

governmental organizations in Mongolia, China and South Korea will meet to work out a regional response to HIV and AIDS. Delegates from North Korea and eastern Russia were not available to attend.

Further evidence of the higher priority is Mongolia's new National AIDS Committee, set up on October 29 and headed by Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan. Its members include several cabinet ministers and the mayor of Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia's Manila delegates met last week to thrash out an action plan against AIDS.

A 20-point draft

prepared by Dr. Kh Davaajav of the AIDS/STD Department of the Research Centre for Infectious Diseases and Dr. S. Enkhbat of the Health Ministry is long on high-profile gestures, including a televised speech to the nation by the Prime Minister on World AIDS Day December 1, a bid to proclaim 1998 AIDS year, an annual selection of the top awareness-raising journalist and a children's competition.

These are the sort of gestures that don't cost much money. But the draft plan does signal a shift in attitude in a country where govern-

ments have long viewed healthcare in authoritarian terms.

As recently as this September, Ulaanbaatar health authorities announced a plan for mandatory STD and HIV testing of all female city residents between the ages of 15 and 40.

That's the sort of move that makes AIDS activists, and international donor organizations, cringe. But after the Philippine Congress, the delegates, including senior Ministry of Health figures, vowed to promote the 10-point Manila Manifesto. Among other things, it resolves to uphold international

guidelines on HIV/AIDS and human rights.

The Mongolian action plan, with its commitment to collaboration between government and NGOs, often sounds remarkably grassroots. It talks about training volunteers, about community participation, and proposes to "broaden anonymous services for STD patients."

And it contains some concrete measures: distribution of high-quality condoms — notably at passport offices, railway stations and airports — a survey of sexual attitudes among high-risk groups and an epidemiological survey.

Mandatory testing is unacceptable: UNAIDS

HIV testing without informed consent and confidentiality is a violation of human rights, according to UNAIDS in Mongolia.

Chairman of the UNAIDS Mongolia Theme Group, Dr Susantha de Silva, said that while testing for surveillance purposes was acceptable, there was no

evidence that mandatory testing achieved public health goals.

"UNAIDS therefore discourages this practice," said Dr de Silva, who is also World Health Organisation Resident Representative in Ulaanbaatar.

"HIV testing in which the individuals identity is

linked to the test result must not be done without the individuals informed consent.

"In addition, he or she should receive post-test counselling and have the assurance that all test results - including the fact that a test was performed - will be kept confidential."

However, after discussions with Mongolian Health Ministry officials, Dr de Silva said he was confident the instruction had been misinterpreted and that the programme would go ahead under the ministry's "screening" guidelines.

A UNAIDS statement, released after the mayor's decision to introduce compulsory HIV and STD testing among Mongolian females in Ulaanbaatar, stresses the need for good quality voluntary and confidential HIV testing and counselling.

"Special consideration should also be given to of-



UNAIDS Mongolia Theme Group chairman Dr Susantha de Silva.

fering voluntary HIV testing and counselling to people who engage in high-risk sexual or drug related behaviour," it said.

"Community involvement in sentinel surveillance and epidemiology surveys should be encouraged, however community consent

should be secured and the community should be involved in the survey and have access to the results."

Health Minister L. Zorig has been attending a World Health Organisation regional conference in Sydney, Australia, and was unavailable for comment.



Mandatory AIDS tests spark controversy

Critics claim government's plan wrong-headed and unworkable

By JILL LAWLESS

The decision by Ulaanbaatar authorities to implement mandatory HIV tests for women in the city has provoked reaction ranging from skepticism to unease.

Health officials said last week that tests for sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, would be carried out in the first two weeks of October on all female city residents between the ages of 15 and 40.

"There are 240,000 women who must be tested," Y. Terbish, head of the Ulaanbaatar City Health Office, told the UB Post on September 24.

The testing is in line with a July 10 directive from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare which said, "Aimag and Ulaanbaatar Governors are commissioned to have the population in the 15-40 age group in their respective territories screened for sexually transmitted diseases in the third quarter of 1997, provide treatment to the affected and their partners and report the results to the AIDS/STD Unit of the Infectious Dis-

eases Centre."

Asked why only women were being tested, Terbish said testing of men would be organized as the next stage in the programme, though dates had not yet been set.

He said the testing would be organized by district health offices, and police would assist local authorities in identifying and rounding up women.

"We hope there won't be anyone who doesn't want to take the test," said Terbish, who expressed the belief that it would be possible to test all the women without using force.

He said testing and treatment would be confidential, but not anonymous. The names of women who test positive for disease will not be released, and all will be treated - by force if necessary. Health authorities have already completed STD testing of secondary school girls, and some mandatory testing is said to have been carried out in the aimags.

Mongolia has a serious STD problem. A UNICEF study published in May cited low contraceptive use

and inadequate condom supply as contributing factors to a high rate of infection, and noted that a high STD rate is generally a precursor to an explosion of AIDS cases. Estimating that between 50 and 80 percent of sexually transmitted diseases in women go untreated, it warned that Mongolia was on the verge of a dramatic increase in HIV, and called for "awareness-raising, prevention and care programmes."

The focus of most AIDS and STD programmes around the world is on education, prevention and individual responsibility. International health and human-rights organizations, including the United Nations and World Health Organization, were alarmed by the implications of the government's sweeping move.

For the United Nations - which is set to launch a major AIDS programme in conjunction with the Mongolian government - the announcement was embarrassingly ill-timed.

In response, the United Nations Development Programme reiterated the policy of UNAIDS, the



Is plan to test 240,000 women a dangerous pipe dream?

United Nations AIDS body. While encouraging voluntary testing accompanied by counselling, it comes down firmly against mandatory tests.

"HIV testing without informed consent and confidentiality is a violation of human rights," it says. "Moreover, there is no evidence that mandatory testing achieves public health goals."

Other critics believe the scheme is both logistically and financially impossible - the UN has calculated the cost of 250,000 HIV tests

at U.S. \$9.6 million. But some health and human-rights advocates came out in support of the idea.

"We can't consider this a human-rights violation," said N. Tsevegmid, director of the Mongolian Human Rights Committee, who also runs a private clinic treating chronic diseases. "It is the normal work of public health organizations. It is done in all countries, when it is necessary."

"It is for the health of the women." He said it was "unavoidable" that police would have to be

used if women refused to submit to the examination.

He stressed that sick women should be treated and not penalized. But, he said, it would be necessary to take legal action against those who refused to disclose the names of their sexual partners.

"Such a cross-sectional examination must be done because venereal disease is increasing in the population. To defend the population, money must be spent."

UB Post

22-10-97

Knowledge called power in fight against STDs

Government unveils kinder, gentler anti-AIDS strategy

Education is the key to combating sexually transmitted diseases, government health representatives told journalists last week.

The government of Mongolia recently launched a UN-backed campaign to fight HIV, the virus which causes AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The extent of Mongolia's AIDS crisis is unknown. Since 1992, authorities have claimed there is only one case of AIDS in the country. But the national rate of STD infection is high, and according to UNICEF that is a precursor to an explosion in the rate of HIV infection.

After the recent flap about mandatory AIDS and STD testing, health officials were at pains to stress the voluntary, educational nature of their policy.

Y. Terbish, chief of the Ulaanbaatar city health office, took the opportunity to clear up what he called confusing media reports about the city's

recent testing programme. Contrary to articles in some newspapers, he said, the tests for STDs and HIV were never meant to be compulsory.

That counters his own statement to this and other publications that 240,000 women – all the female residents of the city between the ages of 15 and 40 – would be tested and that, if necessary, the police would be involved.

The announcement provoked a flurry of alarm among international aid organizations and hasty "clarifications" from health authorities.

The plan to test a quarter of a million people was, if nothing else, ambitious. In the decade since 1987, the government's HIV lab has tested 180,000 people. They were blood donors and members of high-risk groups, including prostitutes and prisoners.

In the event, testing appears to have been spotty, with women in some areas requested by police to report for tests while residents of other

districts heard nothing.

Testing was and remains voluntary, Terbish said, though he averred that some high-risk sectors of the population, including street children and sex workers, might require compulsory tests. He stressed that the focus of the campaign was on education and information.

Sexually transmitted diseases are one of Mongolia's biggest health crises, and according to Dr. Kh. Davaajav, head of the Health Ministry's AIDS/STD Department, they are on the rise.

In 1996, 6887 cases were reported, 149 cases more than in 1990 and 492 more than in 1993. And he said that only 40 per cent of cases are properly diagnosed and treated.

Davaajav noted that social factors like rising poverty, prostitution and a crumbling preventative health system are contributing to the crisis. Half of STD-infected people were found to be unemployed.

Another worrying

discovery is that fully half – between 49 and 58 per cent – are teenagers. On average, Mongolians become sexually active at the age of 16 and a half.

Acknowledging these social factors, the government vowed to broaden and strengthen its response to sexually transmitted diseases.

Its four-pronged strategy aims to formulate and coordinate a national disease-fighting plan, develop education and information promoting safer sexual behaviour, ensure the availability and promote the use of high-quality condoms and improve STD prevention and care.

At last week's media event, activities designed to spark discussion among journalists revealed some interesting opinions. A majority felt that sex education for youth was important and did not make young people more promiscuous. But a majority also agreed with the statement, "All foreigners entering Mongolia should have to take an AIDS test."

HIV/AIDS/
STDs

UB Post

14-10-97

Mandatory AIDS screening a tempest in a test tube?

October 15 is the deadline for women in Ulaanbaatar to be tested for sexually transmitted diseases under a scheme announced by local authorities last month.

But the testing period is ending with a whimper rather than a bang.

In late September, the Ulaanbaatar city health office announced that all local women between the ages of 15 and 40 – some

240,000 in all – would be tested for STDs, including HIV.

But after international aid, health and human-rights organizations protested mandatory AIDS testing as a human-rights violation and a misguided public-health measure, civic health officials claimed they had been misunderstood.

In a meeting with representatives of United

Nations' organizations on October 6, they said the testing was never meant to be mandatory.

Health board chief Y. Terbish said voluntary testing was being carried out across the country, reaching anywhere between 15 per cent and a majority of the population, depending on the area.

He said the women were tested for STDs, with AIDS tests conducted at

the discretion of family physicians on those judged to belong to "high-risk" groups.

It's unclear how much testing was done in Ulaanbaatar. In some areas, police were reported to have been knocking on doors requesting women come down for testing. But many women in an informal survey said they had heard nothing at all.

Mongolia's HIV count doubles in one day

"We don't want to isolate or ostracize any potentially HIV infected people from our society."

*H. Davaajav
AIDS Prevention Centre Director*

HEALTH

By D. Narantuya

One of the four prostitutes to have unprotected sex with an HIV infected Cameroon has tested positive for the virus, said H. Davaajav, the AIDS Prevention Centre Director.

The woman is now the second confirmed HIV case in Mongolia, and the first to officially contract the disease in Mongolian territory.

Results turned up positive 14 days after the first testing. The prostitute has admitted to having sex with 12 Mongolian men after sleeping the Cameroon, five of whom have yet to be identified.

Since the announcement the National AIDS Committee, headed by Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan, called for an emergency meeting. Health Minister L. Zorig announced that nearly half of the approximately 60 men who had sex with the four prostitutes have undergone AIDS testing.

"The four prostitutes are currently hospitalised in the Infectious

Disease Centre and are expected to be released soon," said Mr Davaajav.

Some doctors are not ruling out the possibility that Mongolia's second HIV infected person may have contracted the disease prior to sleeping with the Cameroon.

After the announcement, the AIDS National Committee issued a nine-point resolution, including a statement saying that all people under 49 years of age and hospitalized must undergo AIDS testing. It also states that all foreigners coming to Mongolia should have an 'AIDS negative' certificate and it calls for an Tg8 million AIDS propaganda scheme.

The resolution notes that the Mongolian government should have the right to arrest, detain, isolate or deport people with AIDS, but that the containment of AIDS will mostly depend on the will of the public, rather than government action. No word has been made if the resolution will be adopted.

Mr Davaajav commented on the proposed resolution. "An intensive AIDS propaganda and education programme will be implemented. However, we don't want



Committee plans for upcoming AIDS programmes

to isolate or ostracize any potentially HIV infected people from our society."

T. Gandi, Ts. Sharavdorj, both MPRP, and O. Dashbalbar, MTUCP members in the Parliament, accused the government of not taking significant action when "the threat of AIDS looms over Mongolia."

Ms Gandi said Parliament has ignored her words to strengthen regulations on AIDS prevention and testing. She was also critical of the reaction of the MP's and of the public regarding the deportation of the Cameroons and the lackluster testing of the Mongo-

lians and foreigners who slept with the four prostitutes.

The increased number of AIDS testing has led to another problem. The virus diagnosing devices, provided by the World Health Organisation, are now running in short supply. According to Mr Davaajav, the next package of devices are expected to arrive in February.

The first known Mongolian to be infected with AIDS was revealed in 1992. The victim had contracted the disease while in Russia.

Mongolia was the 165th country to register an AIDS victim.

CAMEROON: A Long Way To Go On AIDS Education

The following article provides an interesting comparison to the HIV-AIDS situation in Mongolia. It also presents some food for thought given that two Cameroonian men were deported from Mongolia because they were carriers of the HIV virus.

By Tansa MUSA
Inter-Press Service

YAOUNDE, Mar 5 (IPS)

Despite awareness and educational campaigns by public health authorities and non-governmental organisations, Cameroonians still do not believe that the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) exists.

"Everywhere you go in Yaounde, the answer seems to be the same: 'I don't believe it (AIDS) exists. How can I believe in AIDS when I have never seen a patient. It is all trash,'" says Sa'ah Joseph Azeng, a participant

to a recent seminar on Population, Health and the Environment.

According to Dr Dan Lantum, an AIDS researcher and lecturer in the Faculty of Bio-Medical Sciences at the University of Yaounde I, it has been difficult to expose the disease in Cameroon where the respect for the individual's right to privacy and the fear of being shunned by society has swept AIDS under the carpet.

Journalists who attended the seminar, organised by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the United Nations, Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), say that the lack of adequate information and resources are the main obstacles to AIDS awareness in this Central African nation.

According to a recent survey by the Ministry of Public Health, sex workers, the army and long-distance drivers are the high risks groups in Cameroon. But the incidence of the Human

Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is still largely under-reported, because people are afraid to go for testing.

"You want me to really go for the test?" a shoemaker at the Melen neighbourhood in Yaounde asks incredulously. "I am sure you are not serious. If I ever discovered that I have contacted this terminal disease, the next thing I will do is to commit suicide, because life would have been brought to nothing."

Another Yaounde resident unabashedly told IPS that: "... all the talk about the use of condoms and other contraceptives, or (the talk about) stick to one sexual partner, is nonsense". And yet others like Rita, an unemployed university graduate, still believe that AIDS is a western fabrication.

"How do you expect me to believe in this thing when they say it was first discovered in America and then they go on to tell us that it originated in Africa? Throughout history, the White

man has painted a dark picture of Africa and Africans so as to better exploit us. That is how I see the AIDS debate," she says.

According to public health figures in Yaounde, the capital city, in 1994, there were 230,000 people diagnosed with HIV. Some 2,766 more cases were reported in 1995.

It is also estimated that four out of every 10 teenagers is in danger of contracting AIDS, and about 300 new cases are declared every year.

Public health authorities have opened special clinics to enable people to obtain the appropriate information and counselling without fear of being victimised. But even this effort has not received the full support of the population.

"Only 10 percent of infected persons know they are carriers and this is because they have carried out the test," says Dr. Moni Lob, a haematologist at the Yaounde Central Hospital.

In spite of these difficulties,

however, health experts, agree that mass awareness campaigns and preventive initiatives remain the best ways to communicate about AIDS to the population.

"The most affected persons," says Lobe, "fall between the ages of 20 and 40. So the only effective way of reducing HIV infection is to provide enough education and information for persons, especially students, who will reach this age group in two or three years."

According to Dr Lantum, the population has a two-fold responsibility: to fight against the disease and to accommodate its victims.

Dr Ntone Eyime, a psychiatrist at Yaounde Central Hospital, says people living with HIV/AIDS need moral and family support and should not be shunned as is often the case.

Cameroon's new Minister for Public Health, Golieb Monekosso, who was the former regional director for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Africa, says he will make the fight

against AIDS his top priority. He has already set aside funds to revive the National AIDS Prevention Programme.

Cheik Tidiane Sy, the UNESCO Resident Representative in Cameroon, says that the media too has a key role to play in making the Cameroonian population more conscious of AIDS and other population issues.

"We must recognise that the populations of Africa, notably those of Cameroon, are not always aware of the risk of rapid population growth and sustainable management of available resources, because the media, the link with the people, has continued to relegate to the background problems of population, health and the environment.

"...It is the task of media professionals to use their persuasive talents to let the citizens become more interested in those issues that affect their day-to-day lives," Sy says.

Government backs HIV tests for foreigners, international travellers

Foreigners entering Mongolia will have to present proof of a negative AIDS test if a decision by the National AIDS Committee is adopted.

Mongolians would have to be tested before travelling abroad.

The Committee, headed by Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan, held a crisis meeting January 8 as a wave of alarm about the disease continued to ripple through the country.

At the meeting, Health Minister L. Zorig confirmed that one of the four prostitutes who reported having had sex with an infected man from Cameroon had tested positive for the virus.

"She subsequently had sex with 12 men, but five have not yet been found," said Zorig. "The other seven have been tested."

The results of those tests are not known. All four women are being kept in a special ward of the Infectious Diseases Hospital, where they are being treated for a variety of sexually transmitted diseases.

But while attention – and outrage – has focused on the Cameroon man found to be infected with the AIDS virus, the woman who tested positive has full-blown AIDS, indicating she may well have contracted the virus long before she had sexual contact with the African man.

"We have no proof the woman was infected before having sex with the Cameroon," countered Kh. Davaajav, head of the AIDS/STD Care Centre at the Centre for Infectious Diseases. "The woman herself was not aware that she was infected."

Opposition attack

On January 9, the National AIDS Committee made a presentation to the State Ikh Hural. Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan reiterated the Committee's decisions, which also include spending Tg 50 million on equipment and education and testing all current hospital patients between 16 and 40 for HIV. He also pledged not to socially isolate the infected.

The Committee also called

for:

- universities, institutes and colleges to focus expenditure to give staff health education and training

- capital city, aimag and local administrations to spend a portion of their budget on HIV testing as necessary

- an AIDS education programme aimed at children

- a study of the social psychology of sexual life and prostitution

The parliamentary opposition, meanwhile, is turning the AIDS issue into an attack on the government.

"The State Ikh Hural is wasting time on unimportant matters compared to the AIDS situation," said a statement issued by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party on January 8. "The MPRP group demands the government act in the national interest and take proper measures against the scourge of AIDS."

Three opposition Members of Parliament – the MPRP's T. Gandi and Ts. Sharavdorj and O. Dashbalbar of the Mongolian

Traditional United Party – walked out of the session the same day, protesting that while the State Ikh Hural was debating a law on war, the nation was being attacked by a more insidious enemy.

Gandi blasted the National AIDS Committee, and called for an emergency meeting of the Committee, the government and the National Security Council.

Supply shortage?

Davaajav said the Centre is seeing record numbers of people wishing to be tested – 780 have come in the last three weeks. But the Centre is running short on testing kits, and more are not due to arrive until next month.

Shortages of condoms and clean syringes have also been reported. Monsam, the country's only manufacturer of disposable syringes, was closed down briefly last week after government inspectors found faulty sterilization equipment.

Davaajav says the situation is under control.

"Through the World Health

Organization, Mongolia is receiving diagnostic equipment capable of testing 50,000 people. We've had a great demand this year. But the supply is adequate for the moment.

"Mongolia imports five to six million condoms annually through the United Nations Family Planning Association, our AIDS programme and by retailers. But the distribution is not on target. In February condoms worth US \$11,000 will be imported through a new UN project."

Health Minister Zorig was asked last week to ensure the safety of Mongolia's blood supply. In several countries, including Canada in the 1980s, inadequate blood screening resulted in hundreds of people becoming infected with HIV.

"Blood is free today by law," said Zorig. "There is a problem with finding donors in a market economy. Because of that, patients are provided with blood from their relatives."

"But we need to amend the law, because the results of AIDS tests are not immediate."

Mongolia takes AIDS lead

Mongolia has been put in charge of a project to combat HIV and AIDS in Northeast Asia.

The agreement for the four-year, U.S. \$511,000 project – aimed at coordinating an effective HIV-prevention strategy in Mongolia, the two Koreas and China – was signed last week by the government of Mongolia and the United Nations Development Programme.

The project's Ulaanbaatar office will publish a newsletter, conduct cross-border studies and coordinate communication and networking among governments and NGOs in the region.

U.N. marks World AIDS Day

Several events are being held Monday (December 1), to mark World AIDS Day.

The United Nations in Mongolia is using the occasion to launch a comprehensive public-awareness campaign against HIV and AIDS.

December 1 will see the publication of the first issue

of the Mongolian AIDS bulletin and the kickoff of a poster and television ad campaign.

The UN will also unveil its new Internet homepage. It all takes place at the opening of the UN.-backed Citizens' Information Centre in Ulaanbaatar City Hall on Sukhbaatar Square.



Condoms for cons under consideration

By A. DELGERMAA

Health authorities are considering distributing condoms in prisons to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted disease.

At the start of April, they launched a campaign to test Mongolia's prison inmates for STDs, including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The testing follows a January edict from the Central Department of Justice requiring testing of all prisoners for STDs and HIV, provision of disposable syringes in jails and imposition of controls on prison visitors due to the threat of AIDS in Mongolia.

Prisoners constitute a group at high risk of contracting the virus due to poor health, unsanitary conditions and the potential for unprotected sex. Authorities also say prostitutes regularly visit prisons, posing as relatives, to service the inmates.

Lt. Col. D. Ganbat, deputy chief of the Prisons Hospital, said final results of the campaign — organized by the AIDS/STD Centre, the Centre for Infectious Diseases and the Prisons Hospital — should be available by the beginning of May.

"The test is a preventative measure against the spread of AIDS and one that will allow us to better treat people with STDs," he explained. "When final test results are known, officials will consult in order to work out a comprehensive treatment strategy."

The campaign raises the sensitive issue of sexual activity in Mongolia's same-sex prisons.

Distribution of condoms among inmates has been a controversial topic in many nations.

Lkhamsuren, head doctor at the Prisons Hospital, said same-sex sexual activity is widespread at maximum-security prisons like Maanit.

These facilities have the highest risk of STDs and HIV, he said.

"There is no point in trying to prohibit this behaviour under the law. It's a human right," said Lkhamsuren, who confirmed that distribution of condoms in jails was being considered.

"We can't ban it (sexual activity) by force," agreed Ganbat. "So we should take preventative action to stop HIV and STDs through such sexual practices."

"This testing coincides with a study of homosexual prisoners."

More than 700 prisoners have been tested so far, at Choir, Maanit and Baganuur prisons. About 50 were found to be infected with syphilis in Choir and Maanit. Results from Baganuur were not available at press time.

Testing is slated for the country's 15 federal prisons, with doctors travelling this week to Zunkharaa and Darit maximum-security prisons.

In related news, AIDS/STD Centre chief Kh. Davaajav reported that no one in Mongolia is yet ill with AIDS in his speech marking the 50th anniversary of the World Health Organization on April 7. Sh. Enkhbat, head of policy coordination at the Health and Social Security Ministry, said there are two HIV-positive Mongolians.



Talk on mandatory HIV/AIDS tests again

by D. Narantuya

When D. Byambasuren handed over the Prime Ministerial reins to P. Jasrai in 1992, he boasted that he was passing on a "country without AIDS".

Local gossip at the time circulated that Mongolians were free of AIDS because their blood continued peculiarities.

But just months later Mongolia's first HIV case was recorded.

This year, after an alarming shortage of AIDS prevention publicity, the Mongolian Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched an awareness campaign.

At last week's South Asian Regional Meeting on AIDS in Ulaanbaatar, the director of China's AIDS Network and member of National AIDS Expert Committee on AIDS Control, Prof. Kong-Lai Zhang, urged Mongolians to urgently address the need for education.

Prof. Kong-Lai Zhang said he was sceptical about the efficiency of the compulsory testing.

"What we need is accessible information, education and prevention - after which people must decide themselves whether or not to undergo testing," he said.

The meeting was the first regional conference on AIDS to be held in Mongolia.

Health Ministry Policy Coordination and International Cooperation chairman Sh. Enkhbat told the meeting he did not believe there was only one Mongolian infected with HIV.

"Only three per cent of the population has been tested and there are now more than 1000 prostitutes registered with the police in Ulaanbaatar," Mr Enkhbat said.

"There is also some uncertainty about our HIV/AIDS testing equipment - we need to invite international experts to check this equipment," he said.

Some local government and Health Ministry officials consider compulsory testing as one of more appropriate methods to combat AIDS.

Last month the Ulaanbaatar City Council attempted to introduce STD and HIV compulsory testing for every Mongolian between the ages of 15 and 40 years.

However a human rights outcry from the international donor community saw the Council and Health Ministry change the tests to a voluntary screening programme.

Mongol Messenger

03-06-98

Mongolia a key figure in HIV prevention

The Government of Mongolia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have signed a four year US\$511,000 project to develop an effective prevention strategy for HIV in north-east Asia. The project makes Mongolia a key player in HIV prevention activities in north Asia.

"The project will increase the depth of awareness and understanding of the development-related implications of the HIV epidemic and will enhance the region's capacity to respond," a UNDP spokesperson said.

An office to oversee the project will be established in Ulaanbaatar. UNDP indicated that programme focus will be on health care professionals and policy makers. Community awareness will be promoted, particularly for vulnerable and affected areas. The project also hopes to aid the government in making a more effective HIV education and prevention programme.

Spread in neighbouring countries a big danger

The fact that AIDS is spreading rapidly throughout China and Russia should be considered a great danger to Mongolia, an international HIV/AIDS researcher told a press conference during the fourth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific.

Dr Roger Bernard, Director of Epidemiology in Human Reproduction in Switzerland, said Mongolian health authorities must launch an "active struggle" against AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD).

"It is possible to restrict and even terminate the spread of disease in Mongolia," Dr Bernard said.

Centre director N. Davaajav

said that although there was still officially only one AIDS patient in Mongolia, the number of people with STDs was increasing.

Mr Davaajav said every day between five and seven people came to the Ulaanbaatar centre with venereal diseases.

He said only one person was officially recorded as having HIV/AIDS and no new cases had been revealed in recent laboratory testing.

"But I am afraid that I can't say there is only one AIDS-infected person in our country."

"Before 1990 the Health Ministry conducted general medical checkups among about 80 per cent of the population, but these check-

ups have stopped in 1990."

Mr Davaajav said this could be one of the reasons for the dramatic increase in STDs in Mongolia.

Last month the Mongolian Health Ministry issued a directive to all city and aimag administration to screen 15-40 year-olds for STDs and HIV.

The national testing programme was held over two weeks but extended because the Ministry declared that not enough Mongolians were tested.

The press conference, organised by Mongolian delegates B. Delgermaa (MP), Sh. Enkhbat (Health Ministry) and Jerry Van Mourik (UNDP), was the first to be held during the congress.

FACT FILE

■ The number of Chinese with HIV/AIDS is expected to reach 400,000 by the end of the year and 1.2 million by 2000.

■ In China the number of people with HIV/AIDS is alarmingly high in coastal regions. For example, in Yunnan Province between 45 and 75 of drug users have been infected.

■ In the Ukraine, one in two drug users are infected with HIV/AIDS.

Unprotected sex the norm for street kids

Nearly every street child in Mongolia is infected with STDs, UNICEF worker B. Bayarmaa said during the International Congress on AIDS.

Ms Bayarmaa told *The Mongol Messenger* that in 1996 a Health Ministry and UNFPA investigation indicated that uncontrolled, unprotected sex had become the norm for Ulaanbaatar street children living in the city's underground sewers.

"These children have already developed an abnormal understanding of sex and sexual life," she said.

"According to a UNICEF survey, nearly 10 per cent of street children have been victims of sexual violence."

"It is time for sex education to be taught among street children."

"Judging by the comments from other country's delegates, sexual education in school curricula is commonplace."

All delegates agreed widespread publicity was needed to stop the spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS in Mongolia.

By the end of last year, the

■ Twelve Mongolian delegates attended the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. Among them was Mongol Messenger journalist, **D. NARANTUYA** - the only Mongolian journalist chosen by the United Nations and the Press Institute of Mongolia to cover the Manila conference.

number of infected people in the Eastern European and Central Asia region was comparatively low at 50,000. More than 5.2 million are infected in South and South East Asia.

In a bid to combat HIV/AIDS in the region, congress delegates produced the Manila Manifesto Against AIDS.

The manifesto resolves to:

■ Build a sustainable regional network of exchange and collaboration;

■ Implement the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

■ Increase the allocation of funds in national and local budgets

through innovation and accuracy;

■ Further identify, document and replicate successful responses;

■ Focus attention on vulnerability, risk and harm reduction relating to HIV/AIDS;

■ Mainstream STD/HIV/AIDS into reproductive health and family planning efforts;

■ Undertake medical research focusing on cost effectiveness in medical management and laboratory testing;

■ Develop a strategy for the sustainable provision of appropriate treatments and social support for all people infected with HIV, and;

■ Abolish the sexual exploitation of children, youth and women.

New local commitment to STD, HIV/AIDS battle

HEALTH

The Mongolian Government and United Nations agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding last week in a bid to strengthen Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) and HIV/AIDS programmes.

World Health Organisation representative in Mongolia, Dr Susantha de Silva said the Memorandum of Understanding was designed to share the commitment by all parties to bring about an effective national response to STDs and HIV/AIDS.

"Though only one case of HIV/AIDS has been reported so far (in Mongolia), there is increasing concern that the situation may worsen with the change in lifestyle of the people," said Dr de Silva, who is also the chairman of the UN Theme Group.

He said last week also saw the launch of the UNAIDS campaign, Children Living in a World with AIDS.

A recent UN report states that 1000 children become infected with HIV every day.

The UN estimates that by the end of the year, one million children under the age of 15 will be living with the virus and suffering the physical and psychological consequences of

infection.

"Since the beginning of the epidemic, well over two million HIV-positive children have been born to HIV-positive mothers, and hundreds of thousands of children have acquired HIV from blood transfusions and through sex or drug use," the report says.

"Over nine million children are estimated to have lost their mothers to AIDS."

UNAIDS Executive Director, Dr Peter Piot, said AIDS was the most recognised disease in the world, but that the disastrous impact it was having on children was not given enough attention.

Dr Piot said if the spread of HIV was not rapidly contained, gains made in reducing infant and child death rates would be reversed in many countries.

Estimates quoted in the report indicate that, by 2010, AIDS may increase infant mortality by as much as 75 per cent and under-five child mortality by more than 100 per cent, in the world's most hard-hit countries.

"AIDS has changed the world for children," Dr Piot said.

"It is the responsibility of everyone, governments, communities and individuals - to rise to this new challenge and to bring urgent support to children and their families as they face the uniquely painful realities of life in a world with AIDS."

Rural population coping with the threat of AIDS

HEALTH

By D Narantuya

Danger and shock among the countryside population has erupted since the confirmation that rural men have had sexual contact with the prostitutes who had unprotected sex with an HIV infected Cameroon, explained G. Tsogzolmaa, the Head of Women's movement for Democracy.

"People in the countryside are quite removed from the problems in the city, they have little knowledge or understanding of our affairs. This is a problem with the current AIDS crisis. The biggest problem is that they have not been educated on the danger of AIDS. They still believe it is a disease which Mongolians cannot contract," said Mrs Tsogzolmaa.

The lack of education includes use of condoms. "Many rural Mongolians think the condoms are used for holding butter. They can easily fit two kilograms of butter into one condom.

"Those that know the proper use of condoms only use them for sex outside of marriage, they don't know that they are used to protect against sexually transmitted diseases, as well pregnancy," noted Mrs Tsogzolmaa.

"The establishment of women's centers in rural areas has increased

"Instead of having sex with many people in one position, it is better to have sex in different positions with one person."

Women's Movement for Democracy slogan.



Rural Mongolians are a new target for AIDS education.

education. However, this knowledge has yet to be passed onto men," she added.

Mrs Tsogzolmaa is interested in allowing non-governmental organisations conduct AIDS propaganda in the countryside. She noted that NGOs would be more effective than state organisations.

The Women's Movement for Democracy is the first non-governmental organisation to conduct anti-AIDS propaganda, it was established in 1996. The main target for its work is sex education for young people, it currently has 5000

members in 20 different countries.

The organisation's slogan is: Instead of having sex with many people in one position, it is better to have sex in different positions with one person. The statement was published in the December issue of *AIDS National Magazine*.



Businesses join in the AIDS battle

Government, business and NGOs came together January 23 to pledge support to the fight against AIDS.

Representatives from the Ministry of Health, the United Nations Development Programme's HIV/AIDS/STD Project and the private sector announced the launch of the National AIDS Foundation.

The Foundation, whose board includes government members and executives from several private firms, aims to draw the private sector into the battle against AIDS.

The UNDP's Nicholas Bates stressed the need for all sectors of the community – government, business and NGOs – to work together to combat AIDS.

Roles for the private sector, he said, could include "active and effective social marketing of condoms," aids education in the workplace, and financial contributions.

At the launch, Mongolia Consulting Services pledged to donate Tg 1 million worth of condoms. The Red Cross has also donated Tg 1 million.

In related news:

-The newspaper *Seruuleg* (Alarm) says it has interviewed a fifth woman who claims to have slept with the Cameroon man infected with the AIDS virus. She is 17 years old and a resident of Darkhan. Authorities have now set the number of men who slept with these women at 81, 23 of whom live in the provinces.

-Police and hospital officials in Bulgan aimag arrested 14 women suspected of prostitution in order to test them for STDs and HIV. Three-quarters were found to have a sexually transmitted disease. The HIV tests are pending.

AIDS campaign targets youth

A new U.S. \$20,000 campaign aims to combat AIDS among young Mongolians.

An April 23 meeting to kick off the Mongolian arm of the 1998 World AIDS Campaign – a global effort launched April 22 in Moscow – stressed the need for AIDS education among youth.

More than half of new HIV infections around the world occur in young people aged 10-24. Around the world, 7000 young people are infected with HIV every day.

Mongolia's first official AIDS patient is a young man in his 20s, and the country has a high number of sexually active

teenagers.

More than 70 per cent of Mongolia's population is young, and the campaign coincides with the Year of Youth designated for 1998 by the State Ikh Hural.

Despite the low incidence of AIDS in Mongolia so far, the country possesses many of the same risk factors as other former socialist countries, currently the latest boom area for AIDS.

The campaign, with its focus on information and education, aims to make young people an active force in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS.

"Eleven small projects have been selected from more than 20 to spread information and

education about AIDS," explained Kh. Enkhjaigal, national coordinator of the United Nations' AIDS programme. "They will be financed by the UN starting in May. We hope it will not be a one-off activity, but will continue in the future."

Kh. Davaajvav, head of the AIDS/STD Centre, said 15,000 people have had AIDS tests at the Centre so far this year. "Those people had tests voluntarily," he stressed.

Sh. Enkhbat of the Health and Social Security Ministry said the lack of intravenous drug use in Mongolia was one positive factor on the nation's low HIV-infection rate.

PM makes televised World AIDS Day plea

HEALTH

by D. Narantuya

In a televised speech to the nation on Monday, Mongolian Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan called on parents to be more frank with their children when speaking about HIV/AIDS.

Marking World AIDS Day, the Prime Minister's message came hot on the heels of the first National AIDS Committee meeting on Thursday.

The National AIDS Committee is headed by Mr Enkhsaikhan and includes ministers for Health, Finance, Enlightenment, Foreign Affairs and Justice, the Ulaanbaatar Mayor and the chairman of Mongol Radio and Television.

Mr Enkhsaikhan said despite the fact that Mongolia had accumulated some experience in combatting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD), the struggle against AIDS no longer met required standards.

The Prime Minister outlined a national directive to prevent HIV/AIDS from spreading in Mongolia:

■ Health, youth and other relevant organisations must choose a way to work with mutual trust throughout the vulnerable sections

of society;

■ Enlightenment and Health ministries, and Mongol Radio and Television should launch education, cultural and sport programmes to equip people with the proper knowledge about the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

■ Change the notion that the struggle against AIDS is the only prerogative of health organisations, involve the government, NGOs, public and private sectors in the HIV/AIDS struggle.

■ Improve the quality of medical treatment, change old rules and procedures for medical testing, as well as the prophylactic methods for HIV/AIDS.

"As fight against AIDS becomes a nationwide action, any organisation can allocate funds from their budget, and if necessary we will allocate money from government reserves," Mr Enkhsaikhan said.

Next year the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will contribute \$US703,000 to Mongolia's national HIV/AIDS programme.

To mark World AIDS Day on Monday, the inaugural Mongolian AIDS Bulletin was distributed in a bid to provide facts and objective information about HIV/AIDS, the danger and preventative measures.

The bulletin was funded by the UNDP.



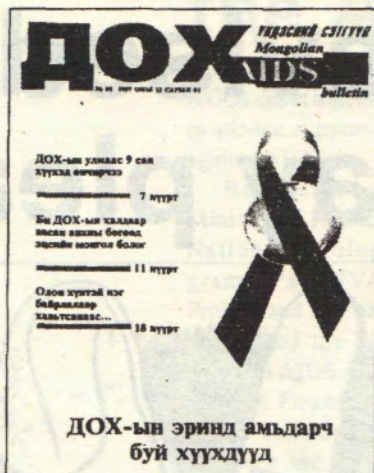
This picture was successful in a national competition organised to enhance AIDS/HIV awareness.

HIV/AIDS/
STDs





Mongolian AIDS patient dies



Will this death mean more awareness?

One of Mongolia's two known cases of AIDS died at an Ulaanbaatar hospital on March 6.

Tumentsog, 35, died from what doctors are calling a "rare lung pneumonia called toxic contamination phenomenon," one day after being admitted to the Railway Hospital. Selenge, a doctor at the hospital, blamed the infection on Chinese spirits, which had a reaction with Tumentsog's medication or weak condition. Doctors treating him learned he was an AIDS carrier after an autopsy was performed at the National AIDS centre.

J. Demberelsuren, the Director of the AIDS and STD Preventive Centre confirmed that Tumentsog was the Mongolian that was diagnosed with HIV in 1992. Until his death, his identity had been kept classified from his friends and family.

UNAIDS representative Kh. Enkhjargal admitted that the release of Tumentsog's long kept secret had been an error. "That information was supposed to be kept private even after his death. The news came as a big shock to his friends and family," she said.

Tumentsog had been working as an engi-

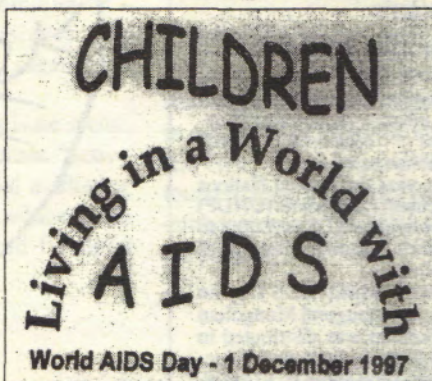
neer at the third construction and housing workshop in Sainshand, Dornogobi Aimag. He was Mongolia's only known AIDS case for six years until a second was found in January 1998.

The second case, a prostitute who had slept with untold numbers of men before the discovery, created a nationwide AIDS scare. Dozens of prostitutes -- who congregate outside the Ulaanbaatar Hotel -- were rounded up and tested. Hundreds of other high risk people voluntarily tested themselves.

The government even considered mandatory testing of foreigners living in Mongolia. It was widely believed that the prostitute had contracted the disease from a Cameroon man, who had tested positive for AIDS while in Mongolia.

No other cases were found, but the World Health Organization estimates that at least 100 more HIV positive people exist in Mongolia. Other estimates say the figure could be up to 400.

"We think that the death of this AIDS patient will increase awareness among the public," Enkhjargal said.



Red Cross stages HIV/AIDS course

The Red Cross Society held a two-day student course on HIV/AIDS this week.

Held in conjunction with World AIDS Day, the course aimed to show students from local universities and students how to avoid HIV/AIDS infection.

Students were instructed by members of the National AIDS Committee.

The Solferino musical group, formed to support charity, also performed during the course.

World AIDS Day activities did not include condom giveaways this year, although more than 100 students from the Mongolian Medical University

handed out posters, brochures and the National AIDS Bulletin to motorists, pedestrians and passengers on public transport.

In addition to the Prime Minister's World AIDS Day televised message,

Mongol TV also broadcast a special AIDS programme for adolescents.

UNAIDS





Reuters

10-01-98

BERT3

Saturday, 10 January 1998 13:21:25

11:58 09 Jan RTRS-Mongolians told to shun casual sex in AIDS fear

By Irja Halasz

ULAN BATOR, Jan 9 (Reuters) - Authorities on Friday urged fearful Mongolians to shun drink and casual sex after a prostitute who slept with an African visitor tested positive for the virus that causes AIDS.

But they resisted demands to quarantine individuals infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and screen foreigners for the deadly virus, which can lead to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

"Fathers and mothers, friends, fellow workers and individuals need to unite to fight against carelessness," the National AIDS Prevention Committee said in a message published in official newspapers.

"We must practise conduct that protects ourselves and society."

In a nationally televised address, health minister L. Zorig on Thursday revealed that one of four prostitutes who had slept with the visitor from Cameroon in West Africa, had tested HIV-positive.

Test results on the other three were not yet available.

"You can protect yourselves and your family by avoiding excessive drinking and sleeping around," Zorig said.

Young people in particular should change their habit of having casual sex when drunk, he said.

Officials said they had traced 56 of about 80 people who visited the prostitutes after they had sex with the infected Cameroonian, and they were looking for the others.

"Although the government can take measures, it cannot protect you from this disease," the AIDS Prevention Committee notice said. It urged people to step forward for anonymous testing.

Zorig said the committee had decided in principle not to isolate HIV-infected people.

"We need to relate to them in a human way," he said. "We need to help and support them."

Opposition members of parliament on Thursday demanded quarantine for carriers of the virus and HIV testing for all foreigners entering the country.

The health ministry said authorities were not discussing any measures to screen arrivals.

The committee is asking the government for 50 million tugriks (\$61,500) to run an AIDS awareness campaign, said S. Enkhbat, director of the health ministry's AIDS centre.

Mongolia, a sparsely populated country between China and Russia, had earlier reported only one HIV carrier. Health workers have distributed condoms to hotels, but authorities otherwise have done little to stem the spread of AIDS.

"There is a danger that AIDS could destroy the whole Mongolian nation," said Hasherdene, a 23-year-old Ulan Bator resident, reflecting widespread public fear.

"I bring my own syringes when I go to the hospital," he said. Mongolian hospitals commonly recycle syringes.

(\$1=813 tugriks)

For related news, double click on one of the following codes:

[G] [Z] [CN] [MN] [HEA] [NEWS] [LIF] [LEN] [RTRS]

Friday, 9 January 1998 11:58:34

RTRS [nPEK01608]

They may look healthy, but one in five Mongolian children suffers from stunting, one in 10 is severely malnourished. 50 per cent are anaemic and the nation's incidence of rickets is among the highest in the world.



AIDS on the Mongolian agenda

HEALTH

By D. Narantuya

A seminar on AIDS, organised by the Mongolian Foundation for Open Society and the Institute of Albert Schweitzer in the U.S.A., took place in Ulaanbaatar from September 10-13, 1998.

A major AIDS seminar has not been held in Mongolia since 1987. At which time, a laboratory for AIDS tests was established with the assistance of the World Health Organisation.

According to recent statements, Mongolia is officially considered to have two persons who are infected with HIV.

However, according to Ralph R. Frerichs, Professor of the University of California, "There are a hundred people behind each one of the HIV infected persons".

In particular, the professor noted that Mongolians should be careful and aware of this extremely dangerous disease because the number of those infected with HIV is increasing in China and Russia, Mongolia's two neighbouring countries.

"The increasing number of the HIV infected in China is a very worrisome issue at present. Specialists believe that the number has

reached up to 40,000. The official report from China says that the number of people who died of AIDS is 280. This number must be wrong, it should be more than this. China usually gives false information," the professor noted.

At the seminar, N. Altanhuyag, an official from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, mentioned that the domestic condition is such that it will allow for the spread of the disease.

Global statistics indicate that the number of individuals who have STDs is increasing year by year. In 1997, a total of 18,082 people in Mongolia were recorded to be infected with STDs. This number demonstrated a 2.5 time increase over the number of STD cases recorded in 1990. According to ministry statistics, about half of these people are unemployed, and 58 percent of them are young people aged between 15 and 25.

"The main reason for STDs is unemployment and poverty," Altanhuyag said.

Specialists at the Health Ministry have indicated that the number might be even higher than the 18,082 that were registered last year.

"Because the STD infected who live in those areas with a small population are afraid and embarrassed to see doctors, they try to treat themselves. Also there are



people who are not able to pay for medical treatment and so they avoid seeing a doctor," Altanhuyag explained.

The Health Ministry maintains that in order to control HIV infection, it is very important to involve as many people as possible in being tested for AIDS.

Throughout the last decade (1987-97), a total of 218,812 people underwent the AIDS test. By comparison, as many as 41,549 people were given an AIDS test last year alone. This increase was a result of a resolution, sug-

gested by the Health Minister last year, to have people aged 15-45 throughout the country tested for AIDS and STDs. In addition, in December 1997, a decision was made to test prostitutes of both urban and rural areas for AIDS.

A representative of the Health Ministry mentioned that with the support of the United Nations Organisation, there are government health organisations as well as non-government organisations which are presently implementing different projects against the spread of AIDS in Mongolia.



'Our society was sleeping for a long time, a member of Parliament says. Everything was prohibited. Now it's like we're just 8 years old.'

sally considered Mongolia's Mr. Clean, and the unsolved murder has left everyone asking which forces had the most to lose by his ascension — corrupt businessmen, crooked politicians or the newly emergent Russian mafia?

"We had naive ideas about each other, and generally about human beings," Hulun laments.

TO FIND THEIR WAY THROUGH THIS STRANGE NEW TIME, Mongolians have looked mostly toward the West, inhaling deeply. "We see American TV and movies," notes Delgermaa, the member of Parliament, "and we're trying to understand what's right and wrong in the rest of the world."

Where the strongest cultural influences used to come from Russia, today the patron culture is that of the United States. MTV plays the same techno, hip-hop and heavy-metal music that attracts young people everywhere. Traditional Mongolian music remains popular, and some of Mongolia's aspiring bands like Hurd are weaving traditional folk themes into Western rock. But a typical stall selling tapes and CD's along Ulaan Baatar's streets features Nirvana, Metallica and Megadeth T-shirts.

Young Mongolians, attracted to everything that is not Communist, also seem, increasingly, to be finding direction through religion. Before the Communists came to power, Mongolia was a Tibetan-style theocratic state. Today, despite the intense and violent efforts of the Communists to stamp it out, Buddhism is enjoying something of a revival. Not uncommon are pictures and posters of the Dalai Lama, who has

visited the country four times. Ulaan Baatar's temples bustle with activity during morning prayers. Tens of thousands of Mongolians have also joined Christian churches, which engage in aggressive missionary work and even run a popular television channel.

Given Mongolia's seven decades of Communist rule, its imposed social isolation and its young population, it is not surprising that the country has spent the 1990's on an occasionally reckless spree, sampling once-forbidden fruits ranging from X-rated entertainment to the excesses of the free market. In a few short years, it has experienced a truncated version of our own social, sexual and "values" revolution.

But it is hard not to feel optimistic about the country too. While Mongolia's young people have doubtless made the transition to democracy a particularly bumpy one, they have also infused the country with a vitality that may well insure its future progress. Mongolia is less corrupt than its ex-Communist counterparts. Extremism plays little role in its politics, and there are few calls for a return to the old order. In a 1997 Freedom House study, Mongolia was the only post-Communist country outside of Eastern Europe to be ranked as "free."

Flashing forward through history that took decades to sort out in the West, the Mongolians are learning in a heartbeat that the best and worst sides of the *fin de siècle* Western world are often entwined. They are learning, too, that the rewards of democracy and free markets are rarely immediate. "Not everyone can drive a Mercedes — some of us will always have to ride a horse," says Batargal, 27, who lives with his wife and two kids in one of the ger districts. "While I am not too hopeful for myself, I am hopeful for our children's future." ■

UB Post 22-09-98

Youth the focus of new UN-backed conference series

Some young Mongolians will get a chance to rate their government on its commitment to children's rights during a series of conferences sponsored by the United Nations.

The One World series which kicks off November 13 in Ulaanbaatar, aims to see how well Mongolia has lived up to its commitments as signatory to a variety of international covenants.

The first conference, set to run November 13 to 15, looks at Mongolia's performance in the wake of the 1990 World Summit for Children.

More than 150 teenage delegates from across the country will assess how well the country has lived up to its pledge to safeguard children's rights.

Five subsequent sessions, running through May 1999, will focus on human rights, population issues, social development and women. The series will be capped with a national summit May 14 to 17.

The series is designed to tie in with the Mongolian government's designation of 1998 as the Year of Youth.

The government of Mongolia and the UN recently signed a memorandum of understanding committing them to work toward the rights and empowerment of Mongolia's youth, who make up a large majority of the population.

In a bid to ensure that it is representative, the series sets quotas on the number of delegates who must be women, from poor families or disabled.

The series is being implemented by Women for Social Progress, a Mongolian NGO.

UB Post

17-02-98

Conference lets youth air hopes, fears

By David SADOWAY

Education reform, poverty, air pollution and a lack of jobs are the most critical issues facing Mongolian youth.

Those topics were the ones most frequently raised by delegates at Mongolia's first-ever youth conference on sustainable development, held February 4 to 7 at Ulaanbaatar's Youth Cultural Palace.

The first major event held in conjunction with the Year of Mongolian Youth, the conference drew more than 170 delegates from 21 aimags.

They heard from more than 30 speakers from government, business and NGOs, including Prime Minister M. Enkhsaikhan, President N. Bagabandi and State Ikh Hural Speaker R. Gonchigdorj.

In addition to listening to speakers' ideas, participants were challenged to craft their own solutions and pilot projects.

One group decided community toilets and public showers would help solve serious sewage and sanitary problems in Mongolia's ger communities.

Another group proposed a chessboard scheme for combating desertification in Bayankhongor aimag that would see eco-teams planting stabilizing vegetation. There was also a suggestion for a Green Cities Programme. It envisioned pollution reduction, ecological restoration and job creation for unemployed youth.

"This open, interactive approach is new for Mongolia," said Prime Minister Enkhsaikhan, as delegates presented him with a list of their priority problems, along with 15 pilot proposals.

Clearly, many youth have problems with the present education system.

Many projects suggested sweeping reforms to the outdated Soviet-style system. Khurd-2000 would see an introduction of social and ecological ethics into the education curriculum.

Other groups suggested a less rigid, more participatory education system and intense training to combat poverty and unemployment in the beleaguered aimags.

Many delegates said they wanted to duplicate the conference's participatory approach when they returned home.

"Writing project proposals or business plans is a good exercise for young Mongolians," said event organizer Tsetsgee Puntagiin.

"Some proposals will likely

be implemented, and we expect that future proposals will be more realistic."

Around 40 NGOs and private organizations also put together exhibits, posters and information displays to accompany the conference in the expo-style Ecn-forum.

Information and condoms, a scarce commodity in many of the aimags, were scooped up by energetic delegates.

Mongolian Action Programme for the 21st Century (MAP-21) — which organized the conference in conjunction with the Mongolian Youth Federation — is producing a video documentary about the conference.

It is designed to serve as a "how-to" kit for other groups wanting to hold participatory workshops.

The kids are alright

Mongolia's youth a powerful social group with special needs

In 1996, the government declared Youth Day, to be celebrated every year on August 25, and last week Mongolia held its second annual Youth Day celebrations.

But although young people are a major social force, the task of addressing the problems of youth has bounced around among many government ministries over the years. Last year this department changed "owners" once again, and is now run by the Health Ministry.

During the Youth Day events, D. Baasanjargal, a reporter with Onodori newspaper, interviewed Yadmaagyn Tomorbaatar, chair of the Health Ministry's Youth, Family and Women's Department.

Since the dissolution of the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League, not much has been heard about youth problems; it is as if they have been completely forgotten. But since last

year there have been a few significant developments in our country?

At an assembly organized during the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, participants confirmed a programme addressing the problems of world youth for the period until the year 2000, and from 2000 on.

It was emphasized that every nation needs to establish a system to address the problems of youth. That is, every country should have its own youth law focusing on specific national issues. And every country must work out a national programme for the implementation of this law and for the regulation of the social relations of youth.

To do this, it is necessary to have a stable structure of state organizations responsible for youth problems. Mongolia has such organizations, but as yet there is no law or

program. Previous governments did not address youth problems as a whole, as the present government is doing. Mongolia now has a structure of state youth organizations thanks to the establishment of the Youth, Family and Women's Department of the Health Ministry.

Today there are also about 20 non-governmental youth organizations and 50 women's organizations. The job of our department is to coordinate their actions, but not interfere in their internal affairs.

Is the law about youth in the process of being worked out?

A commission charged with the task of organization came out of a national council appointed by the Health Minister in March of 1997 to work out the law and our national youth programme.

The commission has drafted a proposed law about youth and a

National Youth Programme, formed the National Council of Youth and has worked out its rules.

The proposed law has not yet come to the Ministry for discussion, but the National Youth Programme is ready to be discussed by the government. We took the opinions of all Ministries, and, with the exception of the Ministry of Justice, all Ministries supported the project. About 60 people worked in the working out the project.

What specific problems does the project focus on?

Many basic things. Youth education is one of the most important issues facing Mongolia today. The project also focuses on employment, health, family and housing problems, patriotism and environmental issues.

Many young Mongolians want to emigrate to foreign countries because of this country's economic and

social difficulties.

Since our country transferred to a market economy, many young people have travelled to foreign countries for business. But this doesn't allow them to familiarize themselves with humanity's great cultural achievements.

I think Mongolian young people should visit three to five countries which are considered the most highly developed in the world, to learn their languages, culture and way of life.

And it is also vital they study our two neighbouring countries, China and Russia. The National Program addresses this problem.

What events does your department have planned for the future?

We will implement the National Programme in two phases between 1998 and 2005. In the first phase, we will establish a national system of youth organizations. The youth

of 1960 were the leaders of Mongolian society. That was Mongolia's renaissance period. So today's young people will be the next generation of Mongolian leaders. We will declare 1998 the year of youth and we will organize a national festival of Mongolian youth on August 25 of next year. Such a festival has not been organized in this country since 1956.

It will be a very helpful thing for our department if a fund supporting youth can be established. If we don't pay attention to the education of our young people, they will end up like Africans.

Why are you singling out Africans?

Some African countries dealt only with their economic problems, but did not work on the welfare of the people. So the equality of development was lost. As for Mongolia, youth are not a weak group, but they are a special stratum of society.



One World Conference targets youth and development

The Government of Mongolia and the United Nations Resident Representative Office will instigate a conference series titled 'One World' beginning in November.

The aim of the conference is to give Mongolia's youth an opportunity to develop

their society based on issues of global importance. The six-part series will include conferences focusing on children (November 13-15), human rights (December 4-6), population and development (January 15-17), social development (February 26-28), women and development (April 9-

11) and a National Summit (May 14-17).

165 delegates from 21 aimags will be selected to participate in each conference. The targeted representatives, aged 15-19, are mainly female, disabled or from low income families.

The United Nations suggests that the confer-

ence series will encourage young people to take a greater interest in the development of their communities and nation as a whole.

The conferences will include lectures but will focus on debate and discussion seminars led by the young delegates.

'One World' series launched

By D. Naran TUYA

The first United Nations One World conference will be held on November 20, with the theme 'Child.'

The 147 children participating in the conference were chosen by a written essay. 10 are invalids, 43 are from poor families and two are school drop outs. The conference features a theme song and a 'One World' newspaper, which was printed in 20,000 copies and distributed to rural and urban children.

Shows and parties related to the One World conference

were organised at the Institute of Trade and Industry, Secondary School No. 52, and the Institute of Movie Art.

A drawing competition was held at the special school #29, for children with ear and eye problems. Also sponsored was a translation competition named 'If you want to know more about the One World Conference,' at the Institute of International Relations. A questionnaire on the United Nations was organised at the children care taking centers 'Itgel' and 'Temuulel.'

The 'Child Conference' will be held at the Children's Palace November 20-23. The final conference day will be held in the

Government House.

The conference will feature several sectional meetings including: child-education, child-labour, food, health, AIDS, sex education, children's participation-games, children in difficult conditions and environmental education.

The conference will feature a government report on 'Implementation in Mongolia of Children's Supreme Assembly,' as well as sport and art activities.

The conference is supported by United Nations Agencies, International organisations and embassies.

First teen sex survey taken

54 percent of teenagers want to know more about sex, a recent poll on teenagers said.

The survey, conducted jointly by the government of Mongolia and the UN Population Fund, was the first ever survey in Mongolia on teen sex life.

The survey questioned 4674 teens from Ulaanbaatar and eight aimags.

65 percent of teens said they learn about sex from their friends, 56 percent learn from books and 22 percent from movies.

19 percent of girls have had sex by the age of 17.2 and 29.3 percent of boys had sex by 16.8 years (these are the world averages).

Scouts on a mission



Charge! boy and girl scouts enthusiastically stampede forward.

Rovers march across the countryside spreading the good word about health and happiness to all Mongolians

By B. Indra

To contribute in the development of a changing Mongolia, the Mongolian Association for Scouts (MAS) recently held its third 'Global Development Village Caravan.'

The 13 aimag trip spread important information about AIDS, STD's, tobacco and alcohol.

"The main purpose of the trip was to give information on urgent issues, including ways to prevent disease and promote sex education, children's rights and harmony,"

said M. Yosonmonkh, Chief Commissioner of the Scout Association of Mongolia.

The 'Global Development Village Caravan' was organised during the first National Jamboree of the Mongolian Scouts in 1996. Its organisers are the Mongolian Association for Scouts, United Nations Children's Fund, youth, family, and women's organisations of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Ten 18-22 year old's assisted in the trip. Nearly 6000 young people participated in the government financed event.

"We felt that such activities are so important and needed in the rural areas. We hope to continue our work in this section," Mr Yosonmonkh said.

Mongolia's first scout troop was organised by Yosonmonkh on March 17, 1991. The MAS was officially established on April 16, 1992, it registered 200 members in its first year.

"The main objective of the association is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals. It seeks to create responsible

citizens of their local, national and international communities," Yosonmonkh noted.

Today, MAS has over 5000 members, including 1600 adult troop leaders. 10,000 more have expressed their interest in joining. 3000 youngsters participated in scout camp last summer.

A main goal of scouts worldwide is to contribute to social development. The Solongo Child Development and Training Centre in Bayangol District has been supported by the Boy Scouts of Japan for three years. Children at the centre learn important trades like wood work, gardening and sewing. The Mongolian scouts assist the project by fund raising for teachers salaries.

A recent goal of MAS has been to find more scout leaders. "We need to train scout leaders who will can lead children and are willing to sacrifice their time to help out," the commissioner said. He added that the seven-member national council will convene for a seminar in November to smooth out financial and operational difficulties.

In August 1999, scouts of the Asian Pacific Region will hold a conference in Mongolia. 200 scouts from more than 20 countries are expected to participate with 500 Mongolian youngsters from each aimag.



A caravaning bus visited towns and set up displays on important health and social issues.



One World draws kids from all corners of nation

By D. Narantuya

Preparation work has begun for the Mongolian government and United Nations sponsored 'One World' conference series.

The conference, attended by 15-19 year olds, will bring together youth from across the nation. Its main objective is to train young leaders to contribute to the development of the country.

The first conference, with the theme 'children,' will be held November 20, the venue has not yet been determined. The conference date was pushed back from its original November 13-15, as organisers intended the conference to coincide with convention of Children's rights.

The Mongolian side is being represented by the Women for Social Progress. According to Narantuya, a specialist from the movement, scores of various groups will be present. This includes three to seven person aimag committees, members of local youth and state organisation, students, a UN volunteer, and a representative from the debate programme sector.

Conference participants are accepted from a large field of applicants. Young people are allowed

to apply to only one conference and are required to prepare a written essay about the conference which interests them most. Themes include, children, human rights, population development, social development and women development. 20 representatives from each conference will be selected to participate in the National

Supreme Assembly to be held in May, 1999.

The Women for Social progress organised a similar event earlier this year when they organised the young people's mini-Parliament. The participants to the mini Parliament

were also chosen by an essay contest.

According to the aimag's committees for 'One world' report, pupils who participated in the mini-Parliament are now involved in the committees, it shows that the such an activity has inspired them to become active in social life," said Narantuya.

All United Nations agencies in Mongolia have announced their willingness to participate in the conference series. "The agencies of the United Nations can work more effectively by cooperating. This cooperation is a significant aspect of the this series," said Conference Coordinator Susan Boedy.



'One World' kicks into action



"Youth unite!" was the rallying cry for 170 teenagers last weekend at the first of six United Nations sponsored 'One World' Conferences.

The delegates for the three day conference have had plenty of experience to prepare them for this first meeting - the theme of which was 'children.' The idea behind the massive undertaking was to empower Mongolia's youth to take action on issues of global importance in the development of their own communities.

This conference revisited the 1989 world conference on youth, in an effort to reaffirm the nation's commitment to the policies established nearly 10 years ago.

The delegates for this conference, aged 15-19, participated in a number of activities which allowed them to not only learn more about children's issues, but also to express their own opinions on the theme.

"I expressed my feelings on the hard lives that some Mongolian children lead. Some live in the streets and have no home or food. We are trying to decide on their

freedom and their future. We all want to help them," said 16 year old Suvdaa who travelled from Erdenet to attend the conference.

UNICEF spokesman Matthew Girvin said the conference played a significant role in implementing the "Children's voice must be heard," principle, which was adopted during the 1989 convention.

Acting Prime Minister Ts. Elbegdorj agreed. "The Mongolian government is listening to the voice of the Mongolian youth," he said at the introduction ceremony Saturday morning.

The delegates were able to

touch many critical issues in modern Mongolia, including: education, child labour, nutrition and health, sex education, participa-



Conference delegates listened at the opening ceremony (top) and latter broke into discussion groups.

See **ONE WORLD**, page, 5

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One Worlder's speak out, from page 1

tion, children in difficult circumstances and the environment.

Following these group discussions, the participants went on field trips to experience the issues first hand. The group which studied the AIDS phenomenon later visited the Marie Stoppes Clinic.

Many participants came ready to discuss specific issues. For 17 year old Tulgaa of Darkhan, health and nutrition were most important. "When I return to Darkhan, I will speak on local television about health and nutrition for children. I want to educate kids on the dangers of contagious and sexual disease. Maybe I will start a class." Tulgaa said he aspires to one day become a doctor.

But the conference was not all work, it was broken up to include dances, parties, games and shows. On Saturday night a basketball tournament was held, several professional leaguers joined the fun - including MBA superstar Shravjampits. The game also featured performances from several young rock groups, including off-the-wall rap group 'Freedom.'

The conference was kicked off on Friday night with the Convention on the Rights of the Child Anniversary Celebration, which featured a speech delivered by Christina Noble, the founder of a children's foundation operating in Ulaanbaatar. Noble delivered a heartfelt talk on her own life

as a street child in Ireland.

"I met Christina Noble and she sang me a song about children, I cried and she kissed me," said Suvdaa.

"It is amazing how well this conference has gone," said Conference Coordinator Susan Boedy. "It is great to put into action all the things we have been working on for so many months."

More than 6000 young people turned in applications for this conference. Of the 170 selected, more than half live below the poverty line, more than half are female, at least one in seven are disabled and 147 are from rural areas.

Acceptance was based on written essays about problems which children face.

"I wrote about children's freedom and the present day condition of underprivileged kids. I explained my feelings about little girls that have to sell their bodies to survive," said Suvdaa.

"It was not easy to select the best essays as many were well written and well thought out. This group of young people tried to find ways for overcoming these difficulties, and what they could do to change the society for the better," stressed O. Suvd, a coordinator for the One World conference, delegated from Selenge Aimag.

R. Burmaa, the One World Project Director, said she was touched by many of the essays, particularly one from Ovorkhangai Aimag, in which a girl told the story

of life without a father. The girl interviewed more than 100 children from single parent families.

"Mongolians have not heard the voice of their youth since this country stepped onto the road of market economy. We are pleased to have an opportunity to hear what they are worried about and what they are wishing for," Ms. Suvd explained.

"This series of conferences is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the cooperation of the Mongolian government with the United Nations Organisations," said Douglas Gardner, the UN resident representative.

The second in the series of the UN conferences, on Human Rights, is expected to be held December 7-10.

Corrections

For last week's issue (Nov 18)

Page 1. In *Leonid meteor storm rains fire*, column 1, paragraph 2 should have read '40 meteors per hour,' not per second.

Page 3. In *Foundation to carry on work of fallen hero*, column 2 paragraph 3, should have read Tg24.56 million, not US\$24.56 million.

Page 7. In *Erel riding capitalist wave*, the Erel Director was incorrectly called Erdenebaatar, his name is Erdenebat.

New generation confronts once taboo topics at UN 'One World' conference

By Julie Schneiderman

Ten years ago it would have been unheard of for Mongolian teenagers to openly discuss issues of sexuality, now they debate what is the best type of condom to use.

They also openly discuss once-taboo topics like oral sex, STD's and teen-age pregnancies. New societal freedoms have opened doors not only to information but have also broken down barriers which once made such conversations impossible.

A glance at Mongolia in its transition era shows that changes in family and societal values are one of the main impacts of its changing attitudes towards sex.

The debate continues on whether this is good or bad, but one thing is certain: young Mongolians are leading the change in values.

Since the collapse of Communism, divorce rates have increased in some categories by over 10 percent, young couples are having fewer children, STD's are on the rise and freedom of movement has accelerated migration to Ulaanbaatar and abroad. Currently 37.1 percent of all youth live in Ulaanbaatar and half of the youth in Mongolia - over 15 percent of the total population - intend to migrate to Ulaanbaatar. One out of 10 youth want to reside abroad.

These rapid changes have been dizzying for many older Mongolians, who must come to terms with the changing mentality of the population, 33 percent of whom are between the ages of 16-32. In Ulaanbaatar, change is a part of everyday life. New restaurants and bars are cropping up on every corner. Foreign influences in music, food and consumer goods are growing at a rapid pace. Mongolians have even garnered the attention of the foreign press, including a November article in the *New York Times Magazine*, calling the country the youngest in the world.

On an average Friday night at the Top Ten Disco, government and UN outreach workers distribute condoms and a youth calendar called, "What's Up?." Young women decked in mini skirts and knee high leather boots

make their way into the enormous warehouse-like club together with young men in brightly coloured, silk button downs. "Calendars in their back pockets and condoms in their front pockets," commented Enkhsoyt the government official from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare as he handed out the materials.

They are targeting the thriving club scene, the vanguard of Mongolia's sexual revolution.

Next stop was the Hard Rock, a smaller club in the center of the city known for its trendy crowd and cool ambience. The condoms and calendars floated amidst the boy bands, striptease acts and copious alcohol consumption. One table of young women, sipping beer and watching the scene on the dance floor giggled when they realized what had been handed to

consistently shown that sexuality education and family life education in schools actually delays the onset of sexual activity, reduces the number of STD's and reduces the number of unwanted pregnancies."

The debate over shifting values and changing life-styles had a public airing at a mid-January UN conference. Unique to Mongolia, the six One World Youth Conferences (this one was on population and development) rally youth from across the country. It was the third in the series and challenged youth to examine the international conferences attended by Mongolia and the agreements signed by Mongolia since 1990.

For three days in Ulaanbaatar, One World delegates from all across Mongolia openly discussed, among other issues, gender, urbanization, HIV/AIDS, STD's, sexuality education, adolescent reproductive health, reproductive rights. The candid and refreshing presentation of these issues by representatives from the United Nations, the government of Mongolia and NGO's, left few details up to the imaginations of the 146 delegates ranging in age from 15-19.

The delegates not only discussed the issues, but they made appeals to government leaders, the United Nations, and the community on the final day of the conference at the Community Forum. Once the youth reported their findings and presented their viewpoints, the leaders were asked to respond.

"In your own community you must choose what issues are important and tackle them... You have to see not the problems, but the solutions," said UNFPA Resident Representative Linda Demers. The delegates take the responses very seriously and plan to continue monitoring progress at the final OneWorld Millennium Summit to be held in May 1999.

The delegates exuded a certain confidence and comfort level with the subject matters, which surprised even the most experienced presenters. During the presentation from the UN Programme on AIDS by B. Oyun, one delegate inquired about the best place to buy good condoms and how to ensure good quality.

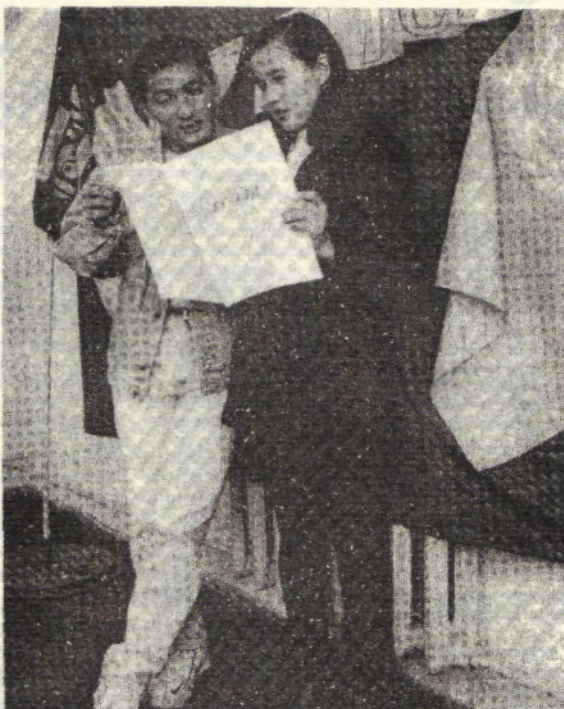


them. They detached the condoms from the calendars and slipped them into their purses. Then one of them leaned over to ask for "another one" for her boyfriend and thank the distributors for doing such important work.

Only in the last few years have Mongolian youth had access to different methods of birth control and up to date information about sexuality and healthy life-styles. The insurgence of condom campaigns and reading materials like the UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) *Love* magazine, have been met with criticism.

Dr. Damien Wohlfahrt, Chief Technical Advisor with UNFPA's Reproductive Health Project explained that "There will always be people who believe such materials promote sexual activity among youth. However, international research in several countries and cultures has

(See next page)



Checking up on the latest One World info.

Oyun remarked later "Even adults don't usually ask these types of questions. It means that young people are becoming more open to talk about sexuality and they are understanding their responsibility to use condoms to protect themselves."

B. Undraa, a 15-year-old delegate from Ulaanbaatar School Number 20, explained that he applied to One World. "To learn how we [youth] can participate in the decision making process, to share our opinions and to put the issues of population and development on the National agenda." He identified reproductive health as one of the most important issues to teenagers in Mongolia. When asked whether his friends know about issues of safe sex, HIV/AIDS and STDs, he blushed slightly: "There are posters on the boards at school about safe sex and condoms." Sitting up straight he continued in a concerned tone, "There is some information, but I feel it is extremely limited."

In Bulgan at Secondary School Number 2, 15 year-old youth delegate N. Bolotuya doesn't receive any classes on sexual education and reproductive health. "I go to a math school," she explained, "Algebra is the focus, so sexual education is cut out."

Sitting in the Margaret Sanger Center, one of the multi-sector programme field trips, with her hair pulled back tightly in a pony tail and her petite stature, Bolotuya looked like a little girl. But her words and insights made it clear that she was taking her role in One World very seriously: "It is through One World that the voices of youth are being heard."

Once returning to their hometowns, both Undraa and Bolotuya plan to share what they've learned at the One World Conference with their peers and families through presentations, informational meetings and presentations in their classes.

The government of Mongolia, the United Nations and several NGO's have taken it upon themselves to ensure that the youth of Mongolia have the tools to make educated decisions for themselves, their peers and their families. Their dedication and commitment is taken very seriously by many youth who take each word spoken as a promise and hope for their future. Bolotuya's words captured this spirit: "I rely on them because they have made promises."

Julie Scheiderman works for the United Nations as Mongolia's National Youth Coordinator



San Francisco Chronicle

08-02-98



MISSION TO MONGOLIA

from home, and far from their usual routine, a group of Bay Area plastic surgeons ply their skills in corners of the world where they are far from taken for granted

Carl T. Hall, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, February 8, 1998

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URL: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/1998/02/08/SC15858.DTL>

Dr. Becky Jackson was starting to feel a little nervous as the bus driver barreled into the northern Mongolia out-back toward the Siberian border.

Jackson, a prominent plastic surgeon in Napa, was leading a team of volunteer surgeons and doctors on a mission of mercy — a two-week whirlwind trip fixing cleft palates and burn wounds, mostly suffered by children growing up among the economic wreckage left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The bus journey was just a side trip, a weekend in the Mongolian countryside, a camp by a lake to partake of the freshwater dolphins and reindeer, and possibly a chance to recover from the violent travel sickness that had been afflicting almost everyone.

Then, as Jackson and her colleagues gripped the seat rails, the bus plunged headlong down into a ravine, moving considerably faster than what seemed prudent. The bus slammed into the bottom of an ancient riverbed, but somehow managed to clamber out the other side intact.

Not so fortunate was one of the passengers — a nurse who had been lying prone on some baggage to accommodate a sore back.

She was thrown from her perch. When she landed, the result was five broken ribs. The accident brought a sudden end to one of the more dramatic adventures of Interplast, a remarkable brigade of globe-hopping plastic surgeons trying their best to change faces, and lives, in some of the most remote places on the planet.

— — These are the same folks who earn their bread, and lots of it, dispensing luxury medicine to those with enough income to deal with their visible flaws.

Interplast, founded at Stanford University in 1969 by reconstructive surgeon Donald Laub, presents another dimension. It is among the nation's oldest and best-known medical volunteer operations. Last year, the group sponsored 28 trips, including Jackson's Mongolia team, and provided 2,300 operations at an estimated value of \$9.5 million in free medical care. The group also paid for seven patients to come to the United States for operations too complicated to perform where they lived.

Similar programs have been launched in other specialties, often directly inspired by the Interplast example. Dr. Ian Zlotlow, one of just a handful of full-time "maxillo-facial prosthodontists" in the country, is spearheading just such an effort in his field, a rare sub-specialty that fits artificial parts to the face and jaw deformed by trauma, cancer or congenital defects.

Zlotlow, based in New York, was invited to join Jackson on the latest Mongolia sojourn in order to help repair defects in older children, for whom surgery isn't always the preferred option.

There's a particular need for such advanced services in developing countries, where children rarely can get the early surgical help.

"A cleft palate is surgically repaired well if you are young enough," Zlotlow said. "But if you are older, a prosthesis is an alternative."

Western medical teams have long been a part of the health care system in developing countries. The impact is felt both through direct services and through training provided to local physicians.

Interplast volunteers and organizers say the program has become increasingly important for the participating doctors, too — offering not only true adventure but also some psychic rewards often denied in the modern world of managed care.

"Here you're just kind of a cog in a wheel, and you feel more so all the time as medicine in this country changes," said Dr. Stanley Samuels, a Stanford anesthesiologist and Interplast mainstay.

"It's really a relief not to have to deal with the paperwork on these trips," added Amy Laden, medical services director at Interplast's Mountain View headquarters.

For surgeons, she said, an Interplast trip "reminds them why they went into health care to begin with. There's no paperwork, no bureaucracy between you and the patient."

(See next page)



Many of the volunteers insist they get as much out of it as do the patients they treat. Some make it almost a second career — one West Virginia surgeon, for example, spends three to four months of each year traveling the world for no pay.

Plastic surgeons certainly aren't risking bread lines by setting aside their practices for a couple of weeks each year. Many view it as a sort of working vacation anyway, bringing family members along for the ride. But the financial sacrifices can be substantial, all the more so for practitioners with thriving private-pay clinics where patients line up for premium services.

Still, top surgeons such as Jackson say they are happy to go away for weeks at a time. When you ask them why, they revert to the sort of idealistic talk one usually hears around nonprofit offices and some college dorms.

"It gives me a sense of giving something back," she said. "I'm a very fortunate person. I have pretty much everything I would want in life. I guess it makes me feel good about myself to go and do something like this."

— — The trip she led through Mongolia was centered on the capital city of Ulan Bator. Elena Dorfman, a San Francisco free-lance photographer, accompanied the expedition.

About 75 patients were treated. Among the more remarkable individual stories was that of a small boy who, along with a sibling, had fallen into a fire. The sibling died. The boy suffered third-degree burns to both arms, and as the wounds healed, shrinkage of tendons left his hands clenched and immobile.

During a previous Interplast trip, Jackson surgically freed one hand to allow the child some movement. She operated on the other hand during the most recent voyage.

"When I first saw him he was just lying on a cot in the hospital — not moving, totally depressed, really a sad case," she recalled of the initial operation.

The return trip found him with one good hand, and "running around wreaking havoc, a completely different kid," Jackson said.

That illustrates one reason plastic surgery has been in the forefront of the Western medical-exchange movement. With a relatively simple procedure that doesn't require much complicated equipment or extensive care after the operation, an American doctor with skills generally not found in poorer countries can make a huge difference in someone's life.

At the same time, Interplast tries hard not to come off as the Great White Hope dispensing charity and thinly veiled messages of cultural superiority to the locals. The teams only go where they have been invited. Visits are coordinated by local doctors working in conjunction with Interplast's rotating cadres.

"We view it as a very collaborative effort," Laden said.

Lots of specialized care is given to patients in dire need, but the visitors spend much of their time teaching local doctors and nurses how to provide the care themselves. After a few years of repeat visits, buttressed by cross-cultural training and residencies, Interplast generally manages to put itself out of business in any given location.

At the same time, Jackson didn't mince words when describing circumstances that awaited her and her colleagues in Mongolia.

It was among the more challenging locations, by all accounts, despite the heroic efforts of local physicians and organizers.

"In Mongolia," Jackson noted, "nothing really works."

That became painfully obvious after the bus accident, which happened just outside a town called Moron, located in a mountainous region considered remote even among the Mongolians who hosted Jackson's team. The visiting doctors were not equipped to treat the nurse's injury on their own and were running low on basic supplies.

So Jackson sought help at the only local medical facility — a hospital that had, on a Saturday, no radiologists around to take X-rays. It took a while before the single on-call physician responded to pleas for help. And when he arrived, Jackson immediately reached the troubling diagnosis that he was "stinking drunk."

"I wouldn't let him touch the patient," she said.

Fortunately, the woman's fractured bones didn't puncture a lung or other vital organ, and it was decided the best course of action would be to immediately cut the trip short. After a scramble for \$5,000 cash to charter a plane, the team made its exit more or less intact.

Jackson never did get to see the lake or the reindeer. But she promised her host to try again on another trip, maybe next year.

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HEALTH

Mongol Messenger

12-11-97

Mongolian adolescents are missing out: doctor

HEALTH

A local team of medical workers has launched a health crusade to fight the alarming results of a recent survey which shows that nearly 75 per cent of Mongolian school children have health problems.

According to health educator Dr L. Oyun, who coordinates the Health Management, Information and Education Centre's Adolescent Health Programme, there is a desperate need to target individual behaviour rather than community health.

Dr Oyun said the programme, introduced as a pilot project to three schools this year, aimed to improve health attitudes and education among parents as well as children.

The three schools, selected for their contrasting locations and circumstances, each have about 1500 students and are located in central Ulaanbaatar (School No. 2), Dambadarja (School No. 58) and Chingeltei (School No. 17).

"In 1991 school canteens were closed down and the school's general physical environment has deteriorated - basically Mongolian adolescents (10-20 years) have been forgotten," Dr Oyun said.

"By targeting this age group with this new programme, we hope to improve this environment (heating, lighting and water supply) to enable adolescents to adopt a healthier lifestyle," she said.

"We have introduced free twice-yearly health checkups for

all children at these three schools and after settling on a suitable curriculum we'll begin formal health education classes.

"The social environment is also an issue and the programme plans to run workshops for teachers who may need to alter their behaviour."

MONGOLIAN ADOLESCENTS - THE FACTS -

- One in two school children have dental problems; one in four have digestive ailments; one in two have digestive problems.
- One in five of all school children are deaf, partially deaf or blind. In rural areas the number is slightly less.
- Seventy-four children in 1000 suffer from allergies. Neurological problems plague nearly 10 per cent of adolescents.
- About 16 per cent of adolescent school children smoke tobacco.
- In 1994, nine per cent of all pregnancies were among adolescents under 20 years of age - an increase of three per cent since 1990.

(Source: Health Management and Information Centre survey, April 1997 & Child Pathology survey, 1993.)



Staff at ESS Studio and Dr L. Oyun (centre) are working towards reversing the negative adolescent health trends.

Hard-hit Khatgal

By Jill LAWLESS

Lake Khovsgol is one of Mongolia's top tourist attractions. It is a spectacular area of pine-clad mountains and icy, crystalline water so pure it cries out to be bottled, labelled and sold for three dollars a litre.

Khatgal, the ramshackle village of 2800 people at the southern tip of the lake, hopes Khovsgol's alpine tranquillity will be its ticket to a brighter future.

This "gateway to Lake Khovsgol" is one of the poorest areas in Mongolia.

With its log cabins, hitching posts, pine trees and single dusty street, Khatgal looks for all the world like the ghost of a North American frontier town.

A ghost town is what it is. A decade ago, Khatgal had a population of 6500 and an economy based on logging and shipping goods across the lake from Russia. Now, there is no industry — and no revenue for the local government.

"The biggest problem here is unemployment," says Khatgal's governor of four years, M. Togtokhnyam. "Living conditions are poor. People can't get money all the time, only sometimes. In wintertime, it's very difficult for me. My lobby is full of people asking for money, food, healthcare."

Half the buildings in the village are empty and falling down.

The local hospital is still functioning, but barely. It's a series of musty corridors and dark, empty rooms, where every kind of equipment, and even water, is in short supply. In one dusky chamber, a doctor and nurse attend a 40-year-old woman in labour. They're hoping she gives birth before dark, because there is no electricity at the hospital, or anywhere else in Khatgal. In the delivery room, an incubator sits idle and useless.

The state of health in Khatgal gives some idea of the area's problems.

A doctor and nurse who visited recently from Ulaanbaatar to see women from Khatgal and the surrounding countryside found high incidences of malnutrition, anemia and sexually transmitted diseases — though without any laboratory facilities, many conditions are hard to diagnose.

And even when diagnosis is possible, treatment often isn't. There is a lack of even the most basic medical supplies and

medicines. Antibiotics — even aspirin — are in desperately short supply. All the visiting doctor could tell the women with tuberculosis — another all-too-common disease — was to eat well and get plenty of rest.

Togtokhnyam, one of Mongolia's few female governors, is a dynamic and indefatigable promoter of Khatgal's interests. Her slate is full with visits from international organizations. This month, she will host a UNICEF delegation up to give a workshop on iodine deficiency. After that, it's the Japanese ambassador. The Japanese generously donated three generators to the village. Now she wants to hit them up for diesel to run them.

She says she seeks help from NGOs and private individuals because the government, 800 kilometres away in Ulaanbaatar, is little help.

Khatgal's picturesque location gives it the edge over other deprived rural areas when it comes to visits from diplomats and representatives of high-profile international agencies.

The village hopes it can boost their economy as well.

"We hope tourism can bring money into the area," says Togtokhnyam.

The governor says only 1000 tourists have visited Lake Khovsgol National Park so far this season. Most come on organized tours and stay at private ger camps, putting no money back into the local economy.

So the village has taken steps to get a piece of the tourist dollar. In town, the log cabin-style Blue Pearl Hotel, owned by the village and built with the help of the U.S. Peace Corps, offers 18 beds and basic amenities, including hot showers. A craft shop next door sells work by local artisans. A shiny new Information centre is full of information on the lake and surrounding area. Seven kilometres up the lake, the village has set up its own high-end ger camp.

The governor says these initiatives have made a dent in the region's shocking poverty statistics — 64 per cent of Khatgal's population was classed as very poor in 1997, and 78 per cent of children under 18 were malnourished.

Togtokhnyam is a tireless promoter of Khatgal. But her enthusiasm is tempered by realism.

"Khatgal's problem is that we have very poor and uneducated people. There is high unemployment, and it is very far

(See next page)

prays for a piece of the tourism pie



A symbol of better times: the Sukhbaatar, pride of Mongolia's fleet, in Khatgal harbour.

to hospitals and other services. Schools and healthcare will have to develop.

"The thing we need most is electricity. The government says we have to produce hydro-electric power, but nothing is being done. Right now we have to do everything on our own, because they're no help."

On the surface, Khatgal seems placid to the point of catatonia. But the community holds surprising reserves of life.

At the local youth centre, precious diesel has been poured into the generator for a disco in

honour of the visiting medical team from the capital. At nine p.m., about 50 women sit silently in chairs around the periphery of the dimly lit hall. But then,

all of a sudden, things warm up. Couples box step to tinny tunes and youngsters swing to the sounds of Russian pop and Vanilla Ice. For an hour or so,

the village comes out in a display of exuberance. Then, at midnight, the fuel runs out, and everyone makes their way out of the silent, pitch-black hall.

UB Post 07-07-98

Mongolian university laurel for WHO man

Dr. S.D. Han, Western Pacific regional director of the World Health Organization, is in Mongolia July 7 to 10 to receive an honorary degree from the Mongolian National University.

Based in Manila, Philippines, Han oversees a 34-country region that includes Mongolia.

While in Ulaanbaatar, he will meet with President N. Bagabandi and members of the government.

WHO's U.S. \$2.7 million 1998-99 budget for Mongolia includes projects in the areas of health promotion, distribution of emergency vaccines and health-sector reforms.

The third in a series of profiles of United Nations organizations operating in Mongolia

World Health Organization



Dr. U.H. Susantha de Silva took over as WHO Representative in Mongolia in July 1994. The Ulaanbaatar WHO office itself has been open since July 1963 and was the first UN office to open in Mongolia. De Silva is a general practitioner trained in public and community health and general medicine.

He's 54 years old, a Sri Lankan by birth and worked in Colombo's Ministry of Health for 24 years before his Mongolian appointment.

WHO chronology: The World Health Organization has technical organization status within the UN and its own governing body, executive board and constitution. Unlike Mongolia's other UN offices it hasn't been placed under UNDP administration. There are approximately 150 WHO offices around the world. The organization's headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland.

The first WHO overseas appointment in Ulaanbaatar was a Czech liaison officer in 1963. The first official WHO representative (a Bulgarian) was appointed in 1971. Until De Silva's appointment the Ulaanbaatar WHO representatives were all from Eastern European or former USSR countries. De Silva's position is permanent and he says he will stay in post until "I am assigned another overseas position."

Budget and staff: The WHO office employs 1 administrative officer, 2 secretaries and two drivers. The budget is allocated biannually, with the money being distributed from the western pacific regional office in Manila. Current budget is \$3.2 million (regular fund) with an additional \$1 million in extra budgetary funding. Both funds cover drug purchases, consultation fees and staff costs.

Current range of projects: WHO is implementing 30 projects in Mongolia. These include health policy, adolescent and children's health, health promotion, environmental health, human resources development, nutrition and worker's health. The office also funds

more than 100 scholarships biannually, sending Mongolian medical students, doctors and community health workers to Malaysia, Australia, Finland, Russia and India for specific project related training programs.

WHO priorities: Control of reemerging diseases such as **diphtheria**, which affects mainly children and can develop into fatal respiratory distress and **hepatitis**, attributed as a major cause of liver cancer. **Brucellosis**, a high fever which is passed onto humans from infected livestock (or unboiled milk) and is easily treated with antibiotics, but can be fatal if not attended to.

WHO is also carrying out anti smoking and alcoholism campaigns across the country.

Achievements to date: strengthening of Mongolian laboratory facilities for HIV and STD (sexually transmitted diseases) testing. De Silva is adamant testing has to be on a voluntary basis. Development of human resources - the focus has changed from specific to general medical training. Mongolia has just 1,000 registered general practitioners, as the majority of doctors were trained in a specific branch of medicine.

WHO started training family doctors in 1993. Education and control of selected diseases, with an emphasis on immunization. WHO doesn't carry out immunizations, but works in a technical advisory capacity, assisting, for example, UNICEF on their immunization program.

There have been no registered cases of polio in Mongolia for the last three years and WHO will register Mongolia as polio free at the end of next year if this status continues. De Silva says there have been no registered cases of tetanus for "a long time" in Mongolia and he has never heard of a confirmed rabies case.

Healthy schools and cities projects were launched in July last year. Ulaanbaatar and Darkhan are being used as a pilot study, with health workers from the water, sanitation and environmental sectors etc. forming city wide committees to ascertain an overview of urban health policies and priorities. The committees have expressed concerns about pollution and sanitation in ger household districts in both cities.

Nation contemplates more colour on its dinner plate

By Ch. Baatarbeel

Nutrition has recently come to the forefront of Mongolian interests.

Last month, UNICEF made its annual report on children's health; a workshop was held for Mongolia's 'Health Education of the Population'; and the nation launched its 'Green Revolution' programme.

Each of these organisations agreed upon one thing - the typical Mongolian diet lacks variety.

According to M. Oyunbileg, Head of the Food Research Centre, the Mongolian diet relies heavily on a high cholesterol diet of meat and flour.

"Despite the fact that Mongo-

lia has a solid agricultural base, the national consumption of dairy and vegetable products is relatively low," Ms Oyunbileg noted.

According to the Food Research Centre, the average daily calorific intake for Mongolians is: 192.2 grams of meat; 307.7 grams of flour; 303.7 grams of milk; six grams of butter; 10.4 grams of sugar; 98.4 grams of potatoes; 18.1 grams of vegetables and 3.5 grams of fruit.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends an average meat intake of 40 percent and vegetable intake of 60 percent. Mongolia's figure stands at 75 percent meat and 25 percent vegetables.

Mongolia's diet thus netted a fourth class ranking according to

WHO standards.

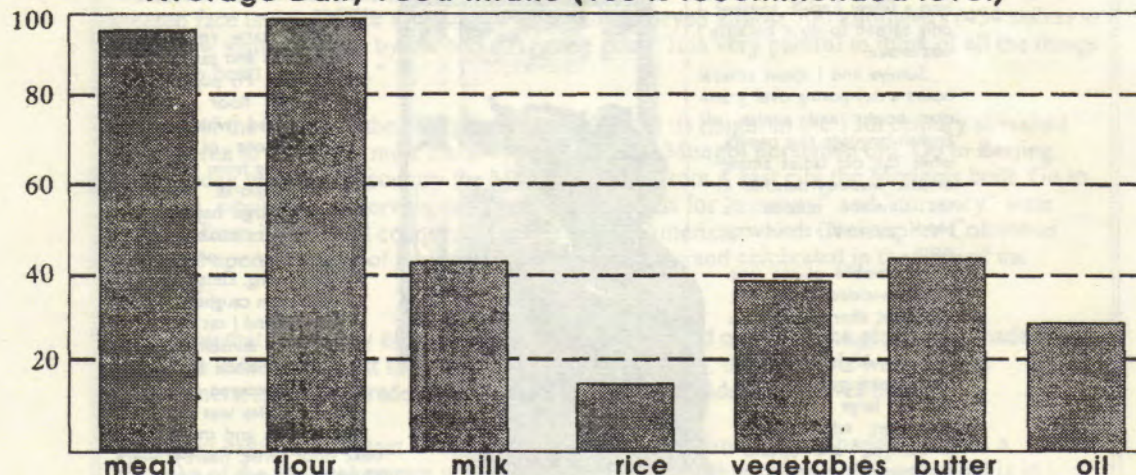
"Mongolians enjoy meat every season of the year, but it was not always this way. Traditionally, Mongolians ate more dairy products in the summertime and cut back on meat. This healthy tradition should be reintroduced," explained Ms Oyunbileg.

She added that the diet, coupled with an urban lifestyle, has resulted in an increased rate of heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and weight problems.

In children, the problem has caused malnutrition, disease and stunted growth.

Ms Oyunbileg indicated that the Food Research Centre is producing health literature for distribution in schools, and other public areas.

Average Daily Food Intake (100 is recommended level)



Mongol Messenger

15-07-98

Birth registration still slow in rural areas

Mongolia is ranked at level one of the birth registration, which means it registers 90 percent of its newborns. This is despite the National law on Family which calls for children to be registered within 30 days after birth.

The Geneva Committee on the Rights of Children says that insufficient steps to ensure birth registration of children, particular children living in remote areas, may

deprive them of fundamental rights. The committee asserts that Mongolia needs to assess the status of timely birth registration of newborn children and set targets for improvements. The response has been UNICEF's 'Progress of Nations 1998,' which examines the immunisations, rights and education of non-registered children.

"Despite dramatic progress on immunisation over the last two

decades, millions of children are slipping through the safety net. It is vital that we focus on the disparities. If most children are immunised, it is important to know more about those who are not, and why they are not," said a UNICEF representative.

The Progress of Nations 1998 also deals with the emerging issue of adolescence and with the growing phenomenon of homelessness.

New Internationalist

June 1998



Letter
from
Mongolia

Secrets and skies

Louisa Waugh gives secret lessons to a government official and ends up drinking vodka with his family.

It all had to be kept very quiet. No-one, certainly no other government official, was to know about my dealings with Sumiya. The daily visits were discreet. Sumiya's driver would pick me up at home and whisk me to the fifth-floor Ulaanbaatar apartment where Sumiya would be waiting. Two or three hours later I would quietly leave and Sumiya would either return to his government office (which I never saw) or start his homework.

I never really understood why our English lessons had to be kept such a secret. All I was told was that Sumiya had applied for a masters in economics in England and I had just six weeks to turn this senior government official into a fluent English speaker. I only agreed to do it because I was broke.

Sumiya and I spent several hours a day poring over grammar books and copies of English-language test papers, while the old ladies sitting on the wooden benches in the sunshine outside his block gossiped about my visits.

His mobile phone was initially welded to his left hand, but after five lessons I banned 'that damn phone' and my 37-year-old student meekly gave in.

This large courteous Mongolian, who trained in Hungary and speaks five languages, told me on our first meeting: 'my wife is good looking, so you see I am fat man.'

He introduced his wife, Enerel, and the four kids, took me out for dinner and dedicated himself (when his mobile phone wasn't beeping) to hastily mastering the English language.

Sumiya's older kids study in Europe, his wife works in a Western embassy and the whole family hoards foreign gadgets. But Sumiya confided in me that he visited a local lama (Buddhist priest) to receive inspiration in his English studies and, out of the office, he often wears the traditional Mongol deel — a calf-length silk tunic buttoned down the right side.

After a month of lessons, Sumiya asked me to spend a weekend in the countryside with his family. 'A few old friends' would be visiting, but, he assured me, we would cram all weekend. I had my doubts. Mongolians drink vodka at any get-together. But I love the countryside and I liked Sumiya and his good-looking wife, so I was

persuaded to join them.

Even as we drove out of Ulaanbaatar, the beer cans were popping. The driver swilled away and Sumiya caught my eye and said sheepishly: 'maybe no lesson today, but you can give me worst test tomorrow.' I had to laugh. We drove 50 kilometres, stopping to circle a sacred cairn, blessing our drunken journey.

We arrived in a cool green valley just before a purple and orange sunset. We camped in a traditional Mongol felt ger, friends arrived and I gave in and got wasted with the rest of them. I slept with Sumiya's family cozily sardined together on several large mattresses and, after a late-night pee outside, drifted into a peaceful drunken stupor.

I woke early, remembered where I was and sat up in my sleeping bag. My pupils dilated — the ger floor and walls were littered with corpses. Large sections of a sheep were hanging from the wood-ed ger supports. Five dead marmots (large hay-coloured rodents) were casually strewn on the floor — one with its throat missing. Lunch and dinner had been caught.

Sumiya and I sat outside in the brilliant sunshine practising adverbs while Enerel and the kids potted about the ger. The valley was decked in wild flowers and the herders next door (well, nearby) were milking their mares and fermenting the milk which they drank fresh and warm. It was idyllic.

Sumiya and his family were definitely city folk on a rural weekend. They drove their white Korean saloon car into the distance to go to the bathroom and 15-year-old Nara screamed when she was finally persuaded to mount a horse.

But they all tucked into the pungent flame-roasted marmot meat and that night our ger echoed with a crowd of voices singing beloved ancient Mongolian laments.

Two weeks later Sumiya took and passed his English test (his mobile phone was forcibly removed after disturbing the beginning of the exam). After a flurry of phone calls about the climate, customs and student life in England, he and Enerel were off. But only for a year — Sumiya and his globetrotting family can only live under Mongolia's piercing blue sky.

Louisa Waugh is a freelance writer who lives and works in Mongolia.





19-01-99



Mongols Are Refashioned As Pioneers in Globalism

By **LESLIE CHANG**

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin ..."

-- Italo Calvino,
Invisible Cities

KARAKORUM, Mongolia -- Rome has its forum and Egypt its pyramids, but what remains of the Mongol empire is a meter-high stone tortoise on a desolate windy plain.

Seven centuries on, its protruding eyes are still watchful and its grin as fierce, but the engraved stele which once graced its back is gone, leaving no epitaph for the largest land empire the world has ever seen. Gone, too, is any trace of Karakorum, the imperial capital it was built to protect.

"I came to see all the beauties of Mongolia with my own eyes," says Baanjil, a driver with a creased face under a black visored cap who has journeyed almost 700 kilometers (434 miles) to a site now visited mostly by the odd straggling goat. "It is very painful to think of all the things that have been destroyed."

Seekers of the legacy of the Mongol empire, which at its height in the 13th century stretched from Korea to Hungary, must travel far away, as the Mongol horsemen did. Go to Beijing, which today rules a vast country the Mongols united from a vast city the Mongols built. Go to Moscow, whose postal service, tax system, and words for "treasury" and "currency" were adopted from its Mongol conquerors. Go, even, to America, which Christopher Columbus stumbled upon in search of fabled Asian lands first seen and celebrated in the time of the Mongols.

It is fitting that the legacy of the Mongol khans is scattered over half the globe they made their own. In a millennium that saw the advent of globalization, the Mongols were its first practitioners, spreading trade, culture and science more widely than ever before.

"Mankind came into contact with each other for the first time," says Shagdaryn Bira, a historian of the Mongol empire who keeps a portrait of Kublai Khan -- "The original is in Taiwan," he says regretfully -- hanging on the wall of his office in Ulan Bator, the capital of modern-day Mongolia. "Never before, and never until the modern age, was there such a movement of people, ideas, spiritual and religious values."

Bad Reputation

It is not the standard view of the Mongols. Roaring out of the steppe in the early 13th century, the Mongol armies gained infamy for stamping out entire tribes and cities in what the conquered saw as God's judgment on the sins of the world. "It may well be that the world

(See next page)

from now until its end ... will not experience the like of it again," wrote an Arab witness of the Mongol onslaught. In faraway Europe, the Mongols were believed to be the apocalyptic armies of the Book of Revelation; they were called "Tartars," in reference to the classical name of hell, Tartarus.

But some historians now say the Mongols were merely victims of monumentally bad press. With no written language until imperial founder Genghis Khan created one, the Mongols were fated to have their history told mostly by others. Persian, Chinese and Russian writers alike emphasized their destructiveness and barbarity -- perhaps the only case yet of history written by the conquered.

"I don't think the Chinese were particularly kindly to the people on their borders either, nor the Japanese when they invaded Korea," argues Morris Rossabi, a Columbia University professor and Mongol scholar. "The Mongols just happened to come out of nowhere, and all sorts of legends and hyperbole developed around them."

Yet in conquering East and West, the Mongols also united them. A stable empire meant secure trade routes, which allowed European merchants and missionaries to travel to India and China for the first time. Paper money issued by the Mongols circulated throughout China as far as Vietnam and Persia, stimulating commerce and astonishing European visitors who would not see its use back home for several hundred years. Playing cards, celestial globes and the techniques of Chinese landscape painting traveled along caravan routes on the heels of the Mongol conquest.

It was "an interlude of light in the darkness that for most of modern history blanketed both the Eastward and Westward vision," writes historian Daniel Boorstin.

Strikingly Modern

Seen from today, the Mongols are strikingly modern. They eagerly absorbed foreign ideas; as a primitive culture taking over more advanced ones, they had little choice. Their written script was adopted from the Uighurs, a Turkic tribe. Their siege warfare strategy was designed by Chinese experts. Persian astronomers, Central Asian artisans, and Turkestani traders -- all came to work for the great khans.

The Mongols were active promoters of free trade two centuries before European navigators claimed the mantle for themselves. A nomadic lifestyle is by nature dependent on trade, and steppe herders had long exchanged animal products for things like weapons and textiles. The Mongols built a network of postal stations, stretching through China and Turkestan to the Volga River, that was liberally used by traders.

"Let merchants and caravans come and go and let the fineries and wares of my lands be brought to thou and let those of thy lands likewise be directed," instructed Genghis Khan to a Central Asian sultan.

Such pro-business policies drew the first merchants from the West. A 14th-century commercial handbook for the Eurasian trade route famously, if rather dubiously, asserted, "the road ... to Cathay is perfectly safe, whether by day or night, according to what the merchants say who have used it." One of them was a young Venetian named Marco Polo, whose accounts of his Eastern travels stirred the European imagination for generations to come -- including Christopher Columbus, who carried a copy of Marco Polo's "Travels" on his voyage to the New World.

The progressiveness of the Mongols stands out against what was then regarded as the world's most civilized nation: China. Soon after Kublai Khan conquered China in 1279, uniting a nation that had been separated for some 300 years, he disbanded the civil service of Confucian scholars, encouraged use of the vernacular in court documents, and let slip hallowed rites in place for centuries. "They came from the northern wastes, so one can scarcely blame them," was the disgusted comment of a later Chinese historian.

Yet the khans succeeded in undoing centuries of rigid thinking, most notably an anticommercial bias that was to perpetuate China's backwardness in the centuries to come. The Mongol imperial family funded commercial ventures, supplied ships for overseas excursions and even put merchants in high government posts; past Chinese rulers had banned merchants from serving the government, wearing silk, or riding in wagons.

"The Mongols might have relished the Industrial Revolution," speculates historian Mr

(See next page)



Rossabi. "They might not have treated Western visitors and ideas with such scorn," as later Chinese dynasties did, he says.

Poor and Obscure

It was not to be. The Ming Dynasty, which overthrew the Mongols in 1368, slammed the door on the outside world, built the Great Wall to keep out invading armies, and outlawed maritime trade. The next time Western traders came to China, it was during the 19th century, in gun boats.

The sense of opportunity lost is most palpable in Mongolia, which is today a poor and obscure country. Less than a century after the rise of Genghis Khan, his descendants fell into quarreling among themselves and eventually faded back into the vast steppe. They came under the sway first of the Chinese, then the Russians. Only in the last decade of this millennium has Mongolia regained full independence.

Surrounded by the ruins of a 16th-century monastery built from the stones of Karakorum, visitors slip easily into old dreams. "The best idea would be to move the capital back to Karakorum!" says Mr. Baanjil, the driver, drawing a map in the snow with his finger to illustrate the sense of his plan. He admits, though, that it would probably need funding from Japanese investors. A passerby overhears and cuts in quickly: "It is not possible. It will not be possible again."

After centuries of neglect, will Mongolia's ancient capital rise from the rubble?

By D. BAYAR

Mongolia is not a country renowned for its urban history

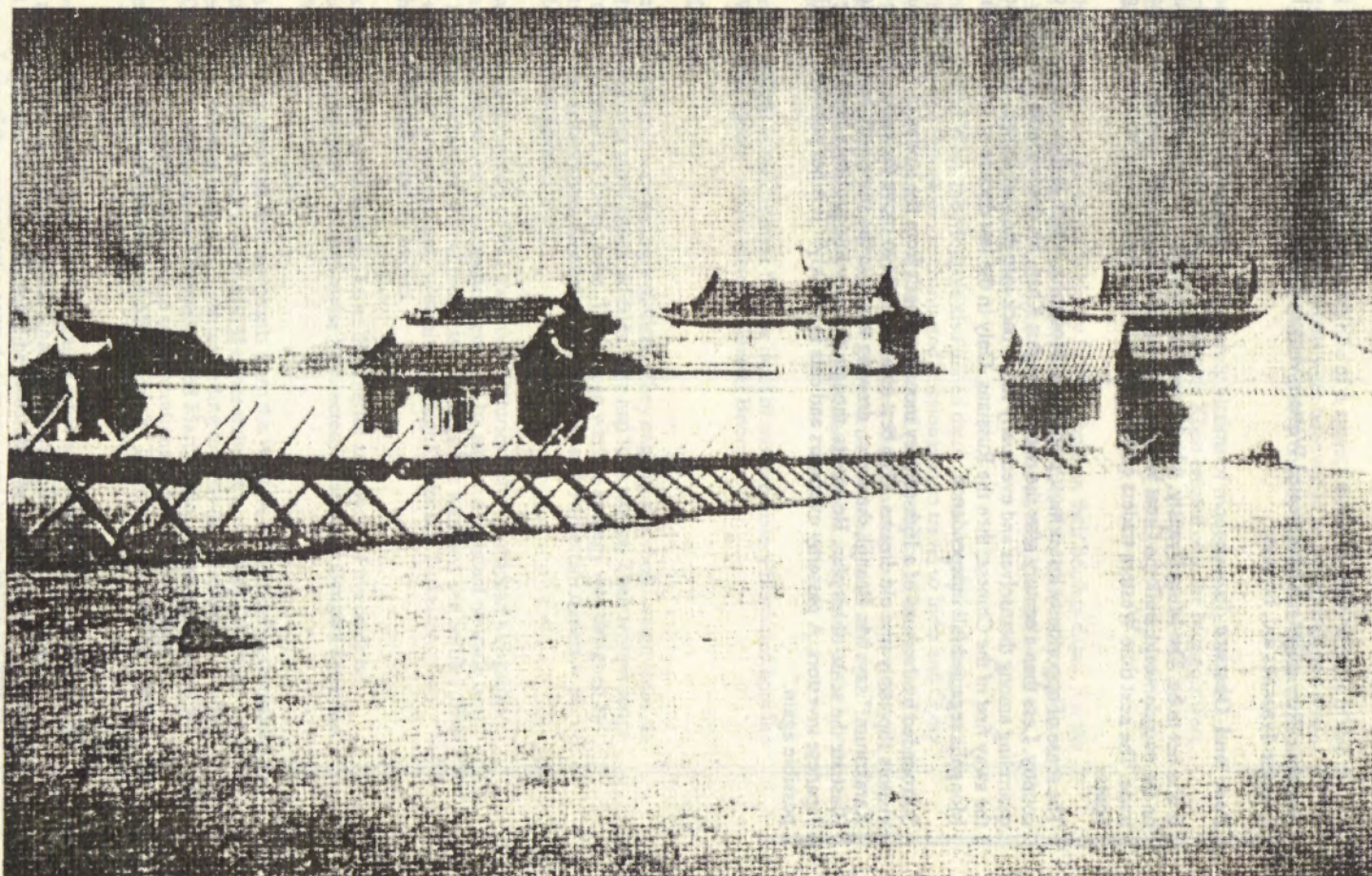
From ancient times, Mongols have been nomadic livestock breeders, moving with the seasons in search of fresh water and pasture land.

But Mongols have established cities over the centuries, and one is legendary: Kharkhorin.

Mongolia's ancient capital – formerly known as Karakorum – is famous throughout the world.

Built on the decree of Chinggis Khaan, Mongolia's first capital became a centre of 13th-century politics and commerce, a vital link in the road connecting east and west by culture and trade. It was a multicultural place, home to people from many lands and speaking many tongues.

The city of Kharkhorin was expanded under Chinggis Khaan's son Ogedei, becoming the real imperial capital during his reign. In 1235, he built the wall which framed the city and created a palace called Tumen



The monastery of Erdene zuu and an empty field are about all that is left of historic Kharkhorin

(See next page)

Amgalant (Total Peace).

But Kharkhorin's reign as capital was short-lived. By 1264, Khubilai Khaan had centralized the power of his empire at Beijing.

It was the beginning of a long decline for Kharkhorin, which over the next few centuries endured the attacks of foreign armies and the ravages of domestic strife.

Nonetheless, after the decline of the Mongol Empire, Mongol khans continued to make their homes at Kharkhorin, and the city was being restored up until the 16th century.

In that century, Avtai Khan ordered the construction of Erdene Zuu, Mongolia's first and biggest Buddhist monastery, on the site of his ancestor's capital.

Overlaid with its new religious prominence, the original city of Kharkhorin faded into the dust. It became something a legend in the minds of most people, a place where once, long ago, great khans had lived.

Today, behind the great monastery of Erdene Zuu, there is only bumpy steppe and braided dirt tracks. On that open steppe were the ancient capital's

streets, buildings and palaces, housing the riches of an age gone by.

It was the Russian scientist N.M. Yadrintsev who first uncovered the ruins of the ancient capital.

He was followed by many archeological expeditions, culminating in the 1948-49 Soviet-Mongolian expedition under professor S.V. Kiselev. They found many valuable artifacts that gave clues to the city's industry and international relations.

By 1976-1980, a team from the Institute of History at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences was tracing the territory of the city square and excavating some land.

The result of all this work was a motherlode of material to help fill in and flesh out the history of Mongolia in the middle ages.

While that is a crucial achievement, there has been no work to protect the ancient capital from harmful human activity, and no thought given to how the remains of an ancient city can coexist with the agriculture and industry of a modern

town.

In the 14th century, Kharkhorin was all but falling down due to attacks from soldiers of the Ming dynasty and domestic struggle.

By the 16th century, it was in ruins. The remains were used to construct the Erdene Zuu monastery.

But its basic territory, its central square, was preserved until 1950, untouched by anyone but the scientists.

The most harmful period for Kharkhorin began with the laying of the foundations of the socialist economy. This doleful story of destruction began when a state farm was established on the territory of the city in 1956.

In the process of implementing the policy of providing the population with food, the authorities ignored the advice of scientists and ran roughshod over the nation's heritage. Most of the territory of old Kharkhorin became ploughed fields.

In 1980, when a new underground irrigation system was established with Russian assistance, the fields were ploughed up once more and water pipes laid under the layer

of earth containing remains of the people and buildings that once existed there.

Poor Kharkhorin got no respect. High-tension wires were strung across the site of the old city, and an expanding cemetery encroached on it.

In 1980, researchers found a granite porch - it was almost immediately stolen. It soon turned up in the cemetery as a tombstone.

On the very site of the city wall were pigsties and chicken coops. Holes left by the archaeologists of 1948 were filled in with offal and rubbish.

Fortunately, foreign scientists began to realize the importance of researching Kharkhorin's role in Mongolian and world history, and began to take initiatives to preserve it.

The Institute of History and the Ministry of Culture drew up a proposal to establish a protected zone around the ancient capital. They applied to UNESCO, the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization, to get the city onto the list of the world's heritage sites.

In the socialist period, their plan for detailed research and restoration remained a dream. But the birth of democracy has facilitated better resolution of problems.

So it was that in 1995-96 a Japanese team under UNESCO's auspices began to implement a project of research and restoration at Mongolia's historic capital.

The first phase of the project involved drawing a detailed map of the old capital, establishing a protected zone and stopping all industrial and commercial work within the boundaries of the ancient city.

But Mongolia lacked even the money to build a fence. Now, with UNESCO aid, the fence is at last being built.

Modern archaeological thinking holds that it is less valuable to dig up all possible remains than to preserve a site in as intact a form as possible.

It may transpire one day that archaeology will involve no digging and we will regret the harm we have done with our shovels.

The UNESCO and Jap-

anese scholars are working on the principle that it's not important now to dig up Kharkhorin's central square. They are leaving that for Mongolian scientists of the future, when the country has become more developed.

Their goal is to turn Kharkhorin into a protected area, build a perimeter fence and halt industrial activity, human settlement and the disposal of garbage within the perimeter.

They plan to build walkways for tourists, clean up the area and restore the walls of the old city and establish a permanent museum showcasing the treasures of the city of Kharkhorin.

This will make the ancient capital a big attraction for foreign and Mongolian tourists alike.

Now is the time to preserve this great historical legacy so we can hand it down to future generations.

ARTS & SOCIETY

LIFESTYLE

A New Brew

As Mongolia changes under the influence of economic reforms, the country's elite are trading fermented mare's milk and vodka for a new status symbol: beer

By Jill Lawless in Ulan Bator

It's Friday night at the Khan Brau pub in downtown Ulan Bator, and the band launches into a raucous rendition of the Beatles' *Lady Madonna*. Young waitresses haul armfuls of froth-topped beer steins to the packed wooden tables. Groups of boisterous young Mongolian women chat energetically; others cosy up to bleary-eyed German businessmen. Stylish students in cashmere sweaters and leather jackets eye the band attentively, and each other surreptitiously. Everyone is in high spirits, and there's not a bottle of vodka in sight. Can this be Mongolia?

Mongolians have always liked a drink. Traditionally, they drank *koumiss*, also known as *airag*—a fizzy and lightly alcoholic brew made by fermenting mare's milk. (It's still the summertime drink of choice for the country's half a million herders.) But 70 years as a Soviet satellite made vodka-drinking an inescapable social ritual. Vodka cemented business deals, lubricated government banquets and fuelled family celebrations.

As the country rushes to embrace capitalism, however, young and upwardly mobile Mongols are learning to love a pint. In a country where the average monthly income ranges from \$50 in the countryside to \$75 in the capital, only the most affluent of Mongolia's 2.4 million people can afford a \$2 pint of European-style beer—a large part of its cachet. For the urban elite, beer's decidedly Western

image—and the high price it commands—have made it a status symbol of the new era.

"People care more about their health now," says 20-something Oyun, relaxing at Khan Brau with a table of friends, all female. "It's to do with the development of the country. There are more foreign products and ideas coming into Mongolia."

Perhaps the thriving beer industry isn't

a surprise, considering alcohol production has always been a strong sector of Mongolia's economy. When the socialist system collapsed in the early 1990s, production plummeted in almost every sector—except booze, which rose. Today, the country has more than 200 vodka distilleries, and Mongolia produces about 12 litres of spirits a year per person. Thousands more illegal businesses make cheap



ILLUSTRATION BY PETER ESPINA AND DICKY TANG

home-made hooch that sells for as little as 300 tugrik (about 30 U.S. cents) a bottle.

In a time when Mongolians were experiencing economic hardship and wrenching change, the alcohol explosion was a recipe for disaster. The country's current president, Natsagiin Bagabandi—who has made the fight against alcoholism a personal crusade—says more than half of Mongolians drink too much. The sight of staggering drunks, often supported by their stoic wives, is so common on Ulan Bator's streets that no one takes any notice.

Police deliver 150 drunks a day to the city's seven drunk tanks. Vodka, say law-enforcement officials, is the reason behind rising crime rates: Intoxicated people commit nearly one in four crimes and are responsible for an increasing number of traffic accidents. "The number of crimes committed by people who are drunk has been rising steadily," says G. Dashtudev, chief of the anti-crime department at the Ministry of Justice. "We have to stop this."

Beer—not traditionally a popular drink in Mongolia—has none of this negative reputation. "When I go out, I drink a lot of beer," says 20-year-old Khulin, who is drinking at the Khan Brau. "It's good because you don't get as drunk as when you drink vodka. And I think a certain amount of beer is good for your body."

Among the most successful businesses in the new capitalist Mongolia are a handful of breweries producing high-quality European-style beer. For the young and newly affluent, beer is

part of a lifestyle revolution, hand-in-hand with Western-style music, fashion and advertising.

"We've made a small revolution in Mongolia," boasts 32-year-old Gendencham Gankhuu, Khan Brau's baby-faced deputy director. He may be Mongolia's leading beer aficionado: President of the Mongolian Beer Association, Gankhuu's also the lead singer of Khan Brau's Beatles-loving house band, Shar Airag. The band's name means—what else?—beer. "Beer is my life," he laughs.

In 1996, Gankhuu, then a student in the Czech Republic, and a friend studying in Germany, decided to launch Khan Brau brand beer. "At the time, there was only one brewery in Mongolia, the state-owned company," he recalls. "And its technology was very old." With the backing of a Ger-

man businessman, they returned to Mongolia, importing everything from malt and hops to a master brewer from Germany. Soon, they produced the first batches of Pilsner ever brewed in Mongolia.

Now, Khan Brau owns three bars in Ulan Bator—including the German-style flagship and the Boar's Tooth, a faux-Irish pub complete with dark wood interior and Guinness posters. Khan Brau's draft is sold in 36 bars in the capital, and the company recently began bottling beer for sale in shops. Gankhuu says \$2 million in investment has gone into Khan Brau, and claims the company is profitable.

Khan Brau and its three rival independent breweries—including the Czech-style Chinggis Beer, named after Genghis Khan—are selling a lifestyle as much as a product. They've introduced such radical concepts as outdoor beer gardens, which bustle with activity during Mongolia's brief three-month summer, and live rock bands.

They've also led the way in introduc-

social evil. The Mongolian Beer Association, founded last year, is lobbying the government to have beer exempted from punitive liquor laws and taxes. The crusade by the president—who recently introduced an anti-booze law to parliament calling for tighter controls on the import and manufacture of alcohol, mandatory treatment and forced labour for alcoholics—is just the latest in a series of such crusades stretching back hundreds of years.

The Mongolian love affair with drink goes as far back as Genghis Khan, who built the mighty Mongol empire in the 13th century. "Neither the Russians nor the Chinese taught Mongolians to drink," says Judith Nordby, a professor of Mongolian studies at Leeds University in England. "They didn't need to—the Mongols had a taste for alcohol dating back to the empire period, at least."

Genghis Khan's son and successor Ogoodei, warned by his brother to drink

fewer cups of booze, promptly halved the number of goblets—and doubled their size. Mongolia's last theocratic ruler—deposed by the 1921 revolution that brought the communists to power—was famous for going on drinking benders lasting several days.

Trade during the Mongol empire brought beverages including brandy, wine and tea, but imported alcohol remained a drink for the elite. It took communism and membership in the socialist countries' trading bloc, Comecon, to

bring commercially produced bottled booze to the masses. Campaigns to combat excess drinking, too, have been launched since, with little success. "The aristocrats of the Comecon period campaigned against drunkenness from time to time," says Nordby. "But the socialist elite drank as much as anyone." Campaigns during *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Nordby notes, were equally unsuccessful. "There's a lot of lip service but rather less commitment."

Beer supporters maintain their brew could change all that. "There aren't so many social problems like crime and alcoholism with beer," maintains Gankhuu. "It comes with a good atmosphere. You can have two or three beers and go home. Beer should not be put on the list with hard liquor. Beer should be like bread." ■



Beer's Western image is a big selling point with young Mongolians.

ing Western-style business savvy to Mongolia. Khan Brau's stylish ad campaigns include massive billboards of Mongolian rock stars and a beer-bottle mascot roaming Ulan Bator's Stalinesque central square. All this comes with Western-style prices, though: A pint of Chinggis or Khan Brau costs about \$2—nearly as much as a whole bottle of vodka.

Gankhuu is aware of how exorbitant the prices are: "Our beer isn't cheap. It's not for everyone," he explains. "If we lower the price, we lose our elite customers. They don't mind paying 1,900 tugrik for a beer if they can sit in a nice place listening to live music. We could sell a beer for 500 tugrik, but what kind of people would come? There would be fights and trouble."

The beer boosters' greatest fear is that they will get lumped in with vodka as a



WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Women and
children

Photo by E. CHIMGEE

They may look healthy, but one in five Mongolian children suffers from stunting, one in 10 is severely malnourished, 40 per cent are anemic and the nation's incidence of rickets is among the highest in the world.



IPS

6 July 1998

MONGOLIA: ECONOMIC TRANSITION GIVES RISE TO STREETCHILDREN

ULAN BATOR, Jul. 6 (IPS) - Nyamochir's family lives 200 km away from the capital, but the scrawny 14-year-old is never far from home these days. That's because he prefers to live on the streets, specifically inside a six-meter deep hole that actually holds part of Ulan Bator's heating system.

Nyamochir shares the much coveted shelter with 14 other boys, most of whom are older than he is. Cardboard placed close to the water pipes for warmth serves as beds during the night. For food, they scavenge the garbage, although an occasional handout provides them some sustenance as well.

"My stepmother beat me everyday after my father died," says Nyamochir. "So I left my home three months ago." He wound up in Ulan Bator, where a group of older boys took him in. They are now teaching him how to survive the harsh conditions of city street living, including fending themselves against rival street gangs.

Streetchildren are perhaps the last sight a visitor might expect in a country with only 2.3 million people and where many still have to go on horseback to get from one point to another.

But ever since Mongolia embarked on a free market economy almost a decade ago and then formally renounced socialism in 1992, social workers say the country's number of children living on the streets has been rising.

According to a survey by the National Center for Children (NCC), there are at least 1,028 streetchildren across Mongolia's few cities - the result, say social workers, of the social upheaval stemming from the country's painful economic transition.

Under the socialist system, there had been a safety net that had taken care of the people's education and medical needs, and had provided jobs. But government subsidies are no longer available, a change that has had a heavy toll on the weak -- particularly the children.

Social workers say more and more youngsters are being driven out of their homes by desperate parents who are now unemployed and can no longer feed them.

"During the socialist times, the gap between the rich and the poor was not wide," say Uranbileg Bergen, a project officer at the NCC, which gets support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"The transition has created many social problems and the numbers of children living under the poverty line is growing," she adds.

"If we don't tackle the problem soon we will have as many as 70,000 children living on the streets."

The political and economic changes are also having a profound impact on the children's health. Among the children under Bergen's care, malnutrition and serious diseases such as tuberculosis are common.

But with the NCC providing the needed care, they are still lucky.

One of Nyamochir's friends has a wracking cough but has not sought medical help. "I sometimes cough up blood," says the tough-looking youth.

Almost 40 percent of the state budget is spent on social development but experts say more than half of that sum goes towards heating expenses and transportation leaving very little for education and health.

Many Mongolians complain that the government is not paying enough attention to their basic needs, and prefers instead to pour in money into business and industry at the risk of creating social unrest in the country.

Last year, though, the government for the first time allotted a 150 million tughrig (\$174,000) budget for streetchildren.

The money is spent on a prevention and rehabilitation programme that includes feeding and teaching the children, as well as counselling destitute parents who have abandoned their children.

A sponsorship program seeking foreign foster parents who will give a \$20 monthly support per child has been started.

Social workers say alcoholism is a major problem in poor families, making it difficult to guarantee the safety of children who run away and then are brought back to their parents. One social

(See next page)



worker here says a boy they rescued had his hair burnt by his mother who was under stress because of family problems resulting from alcoholism.

Programs should thus also be geared toward providing safe shelters, say social workers. But convincing streetchildren to live in such homes poses yet another difficulty.

As Bergen points out, many prefer the streets, where they have all the freedom to do as they please and the opportunity to make quick money. It is also hard to create a family atmosphere in government or privately run homes.

"There is the concept that children have been sacrificed for the economic transition policies of the government," she says.

"(But) as the numbers of poor children grow, people are worried about growing crime and feel at a loss."

Nyamochir and his friends, for instance, avoid the police most of the time for they beg or steal for a living. Often, they also deal with unscrupulous men who use the boys for cheap, sometimes illegal, work, taking advantage of Mongolia's juvenile laws that rarely slap long prison sentences on child criminals.

The NCC says 80 children are now being charged for serious crime such as rape and murder. Many young girls who live on the streets, meanwhile, work as sex workers. Some as young as 13 suffer from venereal disease.

Bergen also notes that the new economic system is causing a new kind of stress on children as they have begun to crave for material goods such as fashionable clothes and electronic goods.

"During the socialist times children wore uniforms to schools and there was not much difference between rich children and children from poor homes," she says. "Now we are hearing of many cases where children are refusing to go to school because their clothes are not good enough."

For his part, Nyamochir would probably be only too glad if he could have clothes that are not as threadbare as what he is wearing now and which can hardly keep out the cold of the winds blowing through Ulan Bator's streets.

Nyamochir, who says he polishes boots for a living, says he wants to learn how to read and write. But the big boys he hangs around with will not allow him to go to a center where he can attend classes. He figures his future is bleak, and that he will probably end up in prison.

For now, though, he and his coughing friend are trying to focus on where to get their gang's next meal. Says his friend, "We don't have enough money to buy even candles for our hole."

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Suvendrini Kakuchi , MONGOLIA: ECONOMIC TRANSITION GIVES RISE TO STREETCHILDREN ., Inter Press Service English News Wire, 07-06-1998.

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Women and
children



The Subterranean World of Mongolia's Orphans As the former Soviet colony struggles with independence, hundreds of homeless children have been forced to live in underground heating pipes.

IN: San Francisco Chronicle

Kathy Lally, Baltimore Sun

Sunday, March 28, 1999

Bitter winter winds are blowing across the great steppe, sweeping the street children underground. Down the manholes they go, carried off like so much refuse by the cold, indifferent currents of air.

The heating pipes that run under the streets of Mongolia's capital have become home to a dark village of hundreds of children living in small colonies down holes across the city. They emerge to beg for food, work odd jobs or steal, then return to their cardboard pallets.

Theirs is one of the countless small tragedies that began unfolding as the Soviet Union lost control of its great empire and the satellites that once spun around it in orderly, dignified poverty found themselves struggling with the consequences of that ruinous dependency.

"The children of Mongolia have paid a heavy price in the transition," says Douglas Gardner, the head of the U.N. Development Program in Ulan Bator. "One of every four children is considered undernourished."

The chaos has limited their prospects, broken their families and, according to the U.N. program, put more than 4,000 children on the streets in this country of 2.4 million people. Homeless girls go to shelters at night, but the boys sleep in building entrances or go into the sewers. The boys are full of swagger, but underneath their bravado is a kind of sweetness.

"Please, come into my hole," says Otgoneaatar, 17, gesturing toward his manhole with as much hospitality as if he were inviting a guest to a snug family home. "My hole is quite comfortable. It's quite nice underground with the heat on."

He's wearing a Titanic T-shirt and submerges fluidly, swinging down the iron bars that form a ladder against the wall of the tunnel. It's dark inside, but there's room enough to stand. The bundle of heating, water and sewer pipes is wide enough to lie on.

Otgoneaatar, who like most Mongolians uses one name, has been living on the streets for four years since leaving his village 180 miles away, trying to escape poverty. He's

the boss of about a half-dozen boys who live in the hole next to a downtown concert hall.

Nyamochir, who is 14 but looks much younger in his worn gray cap and dirty gray sweatshirt, tells a typical story. He came onto the streets last spring, thrown out of his home. "My father died, and my stepmother said she couldn't keep me anymore."

As a Soviet colony, Mongolia grew dependent on subsidies from Moscow. After the nation went on its own in 1990, trying to form a democratic system, the money stopped. Mongolia had to create a new economic system, an onerous task that in a poor country has been accompanied by alcoholism, divorce and destitution. The government has no money to help the poor. And the nation has many children 45 percent of the population is under 15.

"One of the main causes of children going to the street is divorce," says Uranbileg, senior officer of Mongolia's National Center for Children. She has been documenting the life of street children with help from UNICEF.

When there's not enough to go around, despondent parents neglect and abuse the stepchildren, eventually driving them away, she says. The cash-strapped government has set up some shelters, but many children will not go to them willingly. Some are kept away by bullies. Others don't like to be confined.

"Once they've been on the street for a while, they change," Uranbileg says. "They feel freedom."

They also feel tyranny.

One cold, wet day, Otgonsuren, a 15-year-old in a blue jacket, sighs wearily at the prospect of going out to beg for food. "We have to come out of our hole every day," he says. "We have to find something to eat regardless of the weather."

Nyamochir, the small 14-year-old, dreams of going to school so that he can learn to read and compute and get a job when he grows up.

"I never get enough to eat," he says matter-of-factly.

A foreigner gives him a souvenir of her homeland—a bright orange cotton scarf printed with the names of the Baltimore Orioles. Nyamochir takes it eagerly, eyes widening at his good luck, then furtively runs off to a nearby kiosk where he hands it over to the clerk behind the counter. Can he be selling it already?

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San Francisco Chronicle

28-03-99

No. Possessions don't last long on the street, and the kind-hearted clerk stores Nyamochir's few treasures for him. In a few minutes, flocks of street kids appear, clamoring for such an exotic souvenir. One tall boy happily marvels at his — until a girl, shorter than he, grabs him and viciously pulls it away.

"They are tough," says Molly Deatherage, an Oregon woman who runs a group home here, "but underneath they are a neat bunch, with lots of potential — for good or bad, of course."

Deatherage works for Alpha Communities, a charitable organization that wants to build an apartment complex for foster families, with six to eight children each. The 10 children in her group home have learned to live as a family — with good results. Sukhe, now 15, came to the home three years ago after two years on the street.

"He was illiterate, not knowing the alphabet or math beyond what he could count on his fingers," Deatherage says. "Now he's in the fifth grade and doing well, with A's in some courses."

His success has amazed officials who thought it would be difficult to keep him from going back to the streets. "I really think if we do it right," Deatherage says, "the problem of street kids can be largely overcome."

So does Sister Marie Dominique, a smiling, energetic French nun who belongs to the Fraternite de Notre Dame. She and three other nuns run a soup kitchen and are turning a decrepit city building into a 65-bed charity hospital.

"We see prostitution, stealing, all that poverty can give," she says. "I don't call it stealing. I call it survival."

Many families are in deep trouble, she says, with 36 percent of the population under the poverty line of \$12 a month. Sister Marie recalls visiting a hungry family last winter, when the temperature was 20 degrees below zero.

"The food was frozen by the time we got there," she says, "but the children were so hungry they took it and ate it right away."

Sister Marie fires off one heart-rending story after another: hospitals using syringes and dressings repeatedly because they have no others; a child who lost a leg to thrombosis because there was no equipment to look for a clot in a vein; a boy whose legs froze and were amputated after he rode for three days on a freight train in the cold and no prosthetics available.

Don't look for despair from Sister Marie. She shows a photo of a holiday party — the boy who lost both legs sits in a wheelchair, singing and smiling. He's surrounded by other children in clean, warm clothes provided by the nuns. Poverty has not extinguished the childish joy on their faces.

"They are a very proud people," says Sister Marie. "You won't make Mongolians into a dependent people."

More information can be obtained from Alpha Communities Inc., P.O. Box 704, Monument, Colo. 80132-0704. Donations can be earmarked for Mongolia and sent to Fraternite de Notre Dame, House Mary of Nazareth, Triborough Station, P.O. Box 1713, New York, N.Y. 10035.

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Economic Reforms Exact Heavier Price on Women

In June UNDP Mongolia hosted a visit of journalists to see our projects in Ulaanbaatar and the Gobi Desert. This story is just one amongst many that resulted from that trip.

By Suvendrini Kakuchi

Life had never been easy for Jinsmaa, who lives in a small arid town in the South Gobi Desert. But when the national government decided to embark on free market reforms nearly a decade ago, things got even tougher for her.

While wages had been low under the socialist system, no one had really been in want even in the remote regions because the state had provided for the basics of life: health care, education, jobs and pensions.

But then the Soviet Union, which had been subsidizing Mongolia in large part, fell apart. Forced to fend for itself, this Central Asian country decided that the only way to survive was to renounce socialism and implement economic reforms.

The transition, however, has been painful for Mongolians - especially the women, as well as the children and the elderly, says UNDP. Jinsmaa, for example, lost her job as a schoolteacher two years ago. Indeed, of the 900 people now unemployed in Dalanzadgad, where Jinsmaa and her family live, 600 are women.

And while nationwide statistics indicate that the percentage of unemployed women are just slightly higher than that of men - 51 per cent against 49 per cent -- observers say women are more likely to stay jobless than their male counterparts.

Childcare subsidies have all but disappeared, as has state aid for the elderly. Women are thus being expected to stay home more than ever to take care of the aged and the children - many of whom are spending much of the time at home because their parents can no longer afford to send them to school.

Official figures also indicate that of Mongolia's estimated 46,000 households, almost 80 per cent are headed by single mothers, with divorcees and widows making up the majority of the household heads.

Social workers say economic hardship is a major factor in the rise of broken families in the country. It is also one of the causes of the increasing number of women who are being beaten up by their husbands.

Unsurprisingly, social workers say large numbers of Mongolians who live below the poverty line - defined as those earning lower than Tg 9,500 (US\$11) a month - are women. Of Mongolia's 2.3 million people, about 40 per cent are poor, and their ranks are growing every day. In the same year, Jinsmaa lost her job, a National Forum on Women in Development was held here in the Mongolian capital. The Forum pinpointed the need to empower women with jobs that would help them out of their financial ruts and would also enable them to uphold their independence. The goal, said the Forum participants, was not just to aid Mongolian women in surviving the economic transition, but also to help them strengthen their decision-making abilities and be in control of their own lives.

But as one social worker here admits, "The road is a long one. With the current economic problems faced by the country, there is lack of funds to transfer to women's programmes." Not many people are looking at the politicians for help, since women's representation in politics is very low. Out of Mongolia's 76 members of parliament, only seven are women. All the Cabinet members are men.

Jinsmaa, though, has been fortunate enough to become a part of a grassroots project that makes and sells traditional Mongolian saddles and boots. The project is under the National Poverty Alleviation Programme that is funded jointly by the World Bank and the UNDP.

A former collective farm supervisor had spearheaded the project, managing to get a loan of US\$ 250 for it. There are 16 young women, including Jinsmaa, now 27, who are part of it. The women, work five days a week and each earn an average of Tg 30,000 (\$35).

The basic materials for the saddles and boots are bought at the Chinese border. The work is hard, and on any given hour during any workday, a visitor can find most of the women lost in their work. The intricate designs are sewn with a bright, blue thread, the needles alternately flying up and then digging hard into solid leather.

Jinsmaa says she wants to go back to school and study again, perhaps a course that can land her a better job that will pay more. But she acknowledges that this is just not possible now, given Mongolia's current sorry economic state. Jinsmaa is thankful for small mercies. At least she and her husband - who has kept his job as an electrician - are still married. And while her fingers are all scarred because of her constant needlework, Jinsmaa says she is happy with Mongolia's economic transition, and is determined to make it. "I work hard," she declares, "and am grateful for being employed."

(Courtesy Inter Press Service)

Paradox now confronts Mongolia: UNICEF

A text "clarifying the challenges facing Mongolian women and children" was released by UNICEF last month.

Printed in English and Mongolian languages, UNICEF Mongolia, briefly describes the Mongolian Government-UNICEF Programme of Cooperation for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Women in Mongolia.

According to a statement by a UNICEF Area Representative, Keshab B. Mathema, a paradox now confronts Mongolia as a developing nation.

"On one hand, the country's people are well-educated, hard-working and sensitised to the opportunities for positive personal and national change in a world on the edge of a new millennium," the statement said.

"On the other hand, this period of peaceful, social transformation and economic reorganisation has generated stresses resulting in diminished family income, decreased food security, sudden cut-

off to basic social services, and some dissolution of social control systems," it said.

"In cooperation with the Government of Mongolia, UNICEF is firmly engaged in combatting these trends and their threat to the vulnerable.

"In 1997 Mongolia remains a charmed land of scattered nomads living off livestock and local natural resources; however, it is also a developing nation coping with the effects of increasing urbanisation, unemployment and substantial poverty.

"Nearly half of the country's people now live in concentrated communities.

"The number of poor families, street children and female headed households has increased nearly 100 per cent during the last five years.

"Mortality rates for infants and children remain a concern with nearly 50 per cent of deaths for both under-fives and infants resulting from generally treatable acute respiratory infections.



"As physical access to health services have faltered in the 1990s, maternal mortality rates have steadily risen.

"The present economic difficulties and shortage of funds may even significantly eroded past achievements in basic education,

especially in terms of access, equity and quality.

"Dropouts and non-enrolled children in the 8-17 year age group have increased to nearly one-quarter of all school age children.

The book was printed in full colour in Beijing.

UB Post

07-07-98

UNICEF report rates children's rights

Mongolia ranks among the world's top nations in terms of the percentage of births that are officially registered, says UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund.

The data is published in The Progress of Nations, UNICEF's annual rating of countries on the basis of children's rights and women's progress.

The 1998 report, which will be released tomorrow (July 8) in London, seeks to draw attention to the plight of the one in three of the world's children who have no birth certificate and who find it difficult to obtain health care, immunization, education and other benefits of citizenship. UNICEF estimates that at least 40 million children a year go unregistered at birth.

According to the UNICEF data, more than 90 per cent of births in Mongolia are

registered, a level that places it alongside leading developed nations.

The report also looks at immunization rates for children. Global immunization climbed from 5 per cent in 1980 to 80 per cent a decade later thanks to a large-scale global campaign. But progress has since stalled, says UNICEF.

The report takes as an indicator the percentage of babies under one who are not immunized against measles. In Mongolia, the rate is 12 per cent — half the developing-world average of 23 per cent and comparable to the U.S. rate of 11 per cent.

Mongolia also ranks middle-of-the-table in teen pregnancies, with 39 per 1000 females aged 15 to 19. That's the same level as the Russian Federation and much less than the U.S. rate of 60 per 1000.

UB Post

04-08-98

Runners go the distance

Ulaanbaatar's streets hosted an unusual sight August 2 — runners, as athletes from six countries participated in a charity run sponsored by the Japan Mongolia Goodwill Association in conjunction with the Mongolian National Olympic Committee and the Mongolian Athletic Federation.

More than 300 competitors, the bulk from Mongolia and Japan participated in a 21-kilometre half-marathon and in five- and 10-kilometre fun runs.

Yuko Arimori, a women's marathon silver medalist from the 1992 Olympic Games, and Lorraine Moller, a bronze medalist at the same event, were among the runners.

Part of the proceeds from participation fees will go to UNICEF to benefit Ulaanbaatar street children.

UNICEF makes annual report on children's health

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has recently made its annual report on 'the state of the world's children.' Similar reports are announced worldwide, and are generally country specific.

Following the report, participants discussed issues such as food shortages, and malnutrition amongst Mongolian children.

Health Minister L. Zorig, United Nations Resident Coordinator Douglas Gardner and UNICEF representative Keshab Mathema were among the main speakers at the event.

'The state of the world's children' report offers UNICEF a chance to focus on particular issues related to children. This year the programme will examine nutrition.

"Sound nutrition can change children's lives. It can improve their physical and mental development. It will also protect their health and lay a firm foundation for future productivity," said Matthew Grivin, officer-in-charge of UNICEF in Ulaanbaatar.

Nutrition is a matter of tremendous concern to Mongolians, particularly during the present period of economic transition and ag-

gravated poverty. This event is meant to be less a ceremony and more of a rally cry. UNICEF wants the report to become a matter for public discussion and a stimulus for reflection.

In Mongolia, despite impressive accomplishments in improving the health and well-being of children, malnutrition persists and in some areas it has increased. Its effects have been felt on social development and threaten to wither the roots of the country's recent economic growth.

"The recent improvements in child health could be hiding a serious malnutrition problems. Scientific data has already unmasked the significant presence of iodine deficiency in Mongolia.

"There is also evidence of vitamin A and B and iron deficiency anaemia. The often silent but looming impact of this problem, for Mongolian children and for the society as a whole, cannot be underestimated," Mr Mathema explained.

UNICEF currently supports programmes in Mongolia such as growth promotion and monitoring, breastfeeding, diarrhoeal disease prevention, and IDD elimination.



UNICEF aims to improve the health of Mongolia's youth.

Health education targets children

By Ch. Baatarbeel

A workshop to aid Mongolia's 'Health Education of the Population Programme,' was held last week.

The purpose of the workshop was to assess current health education, set future objectives, and broaden cooperation of all sectors.

L. Zorig, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare explained that the initiation and organization of the workshop is a positive step in achieving successful results.

"In order to maintain and promote health in the population it is necessary to set up an integrated network," Mr Zorig said.

A general opinion voiced at the workshop was that awareness and information about health and nutrition have sharply decreased.

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. Health promotion encourages people to make healthy choices and lead a healthy life," stressed Dr. Susanta De Silva, a World Health Organisation representative.

A recent survey among Mon-

"Our primary health focus should be the youth of Mongolia. Rather than spending money on those who already smoke and drink, we should spend on the young generation."

golian adolescents by the World Health Organisation (WHO) showed that 78 percent of Mongolian youth do not have systematic knowledge of health. 50 percent considered it necessary to protect and promote their health. The survey also noted that a higher percentage of youth are now drinking and smoking.

"Our primary health focus should be the youth of Mongolia. Rather than spending money on those who already smoke and drink, we should spend on the young generation. Secondly, we will focus on the health and population of rural areas. Health education and personal hygiene

have taken a downturn since 1990," Mr Zorig said.

Mr Zorig emphasized a discussion of the Mongolian diet.

"It is necessary to change the diet of our people. Maybe we could organize competitions or movements to have rural people engage in farming or other agriculture. This is just one of many ideas we are considering for our health improvement programme," indicated Mr Zorig.



PHOTO BY B. ALTANAM

The fairer sex is celebrated

Ladies honoured on Internaional Women's Day

On the occasion of International Women's Day, President N. Bagabandi sent a message to the second conference for women's non-government organisations. He wished them success in solving women's social problems, in defending women's rights, and alleviating poverty among women.

Mr Bagabandi also recognised that Mongolian women face such problems as prostitution, alcoholism, child neglect and domestic violence. He urged the audience to continue with their efforts in eliminating these problems.

The president reaffirmed his commitment to government policies which would aid Mongolian women, particularly in the realm of education, legal assistance, management training and social aid.

Other Women's Day Events

An official ceremony marking the Women's holiday was attended MP's T. Gandi and B. Delgermaa; the wives of the Russian, British, Vietnamese, Lao, Japanese, Yugoslavian, Kazakh and German ambassadors; and the wives of the Parliament Speaker and the Prime Minister. UNESCO representatives were also present.

The Leading Council of the Mongolian Writers Union staged an event of their own, for its female writers. There are more than 20 female writers in Mongolia, including the laureate and actor E. Oyun; Natsagdorj prize winner Sh. Dulmaa; and two time winner of the Bolor Tsom contest, B. Inchinhorloo.



UNICEF calls for a war on child malnutrition

But does the Mongolian government have the resources for the battle?

By JILL LAWLESS

More than one in five Mongolian children is stunted by malnutrition. But that figure does not represent an emergency, say government officials.

"The situation is critical, but not an emergency," said B. Zarikkan, State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry.

"I wouldn't say food security is at an emergency situation, but I will say that access to the 12 basic food items is not really in place."

A report released last autumn by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization called for Mongolia to receive emergency food aid to combat a food-supply crisis.

The sobering statistic — 22 per cent of Mongolia's children under five are stunted, while one in 10 suffers severe malnutrition — was cited by Health Minister L. Zorig at the Mongolian launch of The State of the World's Children 1998, an assessment of the well-being of the world's youth carried out by UNICEF,

the United Nations Children's Fund.

The focus of the 1998 report is on nutrition. More than 7 million children under five die from malnutrition-related causes each year, and the number of the world's malnourished children is growing.

UNICEF Mongolia used the February 6 launch to alert an audience of diplomats, journalists and representatives of NGOs and private food producers to what UNICEF Officer in Charge Matthew Girvin called "the worrisome status of child and maternal malnutrition in Mongolia."

Keshab Mathema, UNICEF Area Representative for China and Mongolia, called malnutrition a "vast and complex problem" that is both a manifestation and a cause of poverty.

It has a range of causes, he said, from food supply and lack of clean water and sanitation to inadequate health-care.

He noted that the right to adequate nutrition is enshrined in the 1989 UN Convention on

the Rights of the Child, which has been signed by almost all the world's governments, including Mongolia's. He called on the Mongolian government to consider nutrition when formulating economic and social policy, and said the problem could be remedied by more social spending alongside economic growth.

But Mongolian government representatives said their good intentions are hampered by a lack of funds.

"The government of Mongolia has a long tradition of paying attention to the nutrition of child and mother," said Zorig. But he admitted times are hard. He said the collapse of national food production and rising unemployment had had a negative impact on children.

Food production in all groups except meat is down from 1990. In 1996, the average Mongolian's daily consumption of calories was 15 per cent less than in 1990.

Zarikkan said the government was attempting to provide mothers and children under four with nutritious

food, but was "unable to meet the demands due to the weak economic capacity of the country."

Nonetheless, the Health Minister called for a "revolution" in food production and supply and a revitalized domestic food industry.

He stressed the need for "urgent action" to eliminate anemia, iodine deficiency, malnutrition and other problems.

"There is a need for legal support for the creation of a favorable economic environment for domestic food production," he said, calling for legal and economic incentives to this end.

He also called for a state policy on the hygiene of the nation's food supply and a nationwide survey of Mongolia's clean-water supply.

At the launch, government and UN representatives unveiled a Nutrition Manifesto, which calls in vague terms for government and "all members of society" to work together to make progress on nutrition and food security.

THE IRISH TIMES

ON THE WEB

IRELAND

Monday, May 26, 1997

Woman dreams of caring for suffering children

By Paul Cullen

A Dublin-born woman who plans to set up the first Irish aid project in Mongolia has called for a new crusade for children's rights.

Ms Christina Noble has run a centre for street children in Vietnam since 1990, where she has witnessed a growing incidence of sexual exploitation of children, often by western tourists.

"Childhood is becoming an endangered species. Every minute a child is being attacked or a 'snuff' movie is being made, yet no one is standing up and saying 'stop'," she said. "Paedophiles come from all classes, they have the money and they are determined. They seem to enjoy complete freedom to do as they please."

In Australia, concerned parents have organised a series of rallies for action against paedophilia, to culminate with a vigil outside government offices later this year. Ms Noble said Irish people should follow suit.

She also wants more help for the perpetrators of paedophilia, as well as their victims. "They will become crippled adults unless they are helped."

Ms Noble's passion for children's rights is rooted in her own horrendous upbringing in Dublin's Liberties in the 1940s in conditions of dire poverty. Her father was an alcoholic, her mother died when she was 10. Brutally treated as a child, sent to an industrial school, gang-raped as a teenager, her memories of Ireland are utterly bleak.

(See next page)

Ms Noble left Ireland 33 years ago and was running a chip shop in Birmingham when in 1971 she had a dream about Vietnam. It took almost 20 years before she finally made it there in 1989. "When I arrived, I was nobody. I had no credentials, no contacts, no money."

However, with a determination to alleviate the suffering of the children she knew from her own background, she set about raising money with determination. A local oil company helped her start up with a grant of \$10,000. She sang in clubs, made speeches for money.

When she couldn't interest the British media in the plight of Vietnam, she sold them something else, the story of her own life, published as *Bridge Across My Sorrows* in 1994.

So far 60,000 children have received help in "Mama Tina's" centre, which provides medical services, a dental programme, schooling and shelter. "I have just a little bit of knowledge, but all the passion in the world to help get what the children need."

Ms Noble is in Dublin this week to publicise her plans for a similar centre in Mongolia, from where she has just returned. "They have the same problems - children being eaten alive by lice, suffering from syphilis and herpes - with no one to help because Mongolia is not fashionable."

After decades of communist control, the country is opening up, "but the Mongolians lost everything in those years, even their chopsticks".

Ms Noble has no family left in Ireland, though she plans to visit her mother's grave in Mount Jerome Cemetery. Coming here still gives her a knot in her stomach, she said, but she has a dream of eventually settling in a cottage in Wicklow. "I'd love to be able to get on a bus and say 'I'm going home'. I haven't been able to say that since I was 10."

Christina Noble talks about her life and her work in Vietnam in St Ann's Church, Dawson Street, Dublin, at 8 p.m. tomorrow. Admission is free.

DEVELOPMENT: Globalisation Hits Women Worst

By Farhan HAQ,
Inter-Press Service

NEW YORK, March, 1 (IPS) - Financial austerity measures, and the fallout from economic globalisation, have had a disproportionate effect on women's advancement worldwide, forcing them into low-paying jobs or unemployment, says a new study.

The survey, 'Mapping Progress: Assessing Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action', says that 70 percent of the 187 countries which attended the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing have drawn up action plans to advance women's rights since then.

Despite such prompt action in implementing the Beijing commitments, the record of governments in providing resources for women is patchy at best, says the report - produced by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). In many cases, non governmental organisations (NGOs) report that economic adjustment policies in their nations have hindered women's access to employment, health care, education, property, credit and housing.

NGOs submitted reports to WEDO on the progress of 88 countries in implementing the Beijing accords. Of the nations surveyed, 45 percent recently enacted macro-economic policies that caused a downturn in women's employment and 28 percent instituted cutbacks in

female education.

"On balance, women are still the shock absorbers for structural change," says Susan Davis, WEDO's executive director.

Particularly hard hit have been the transitional economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where free-market policies have resulted in cuts in public childcare and dramatic job losses for women, who are often the first employees targeted for 'efficiencies' by privatising companies.

Women's unemployment averaged 70 percent in Armenia, Russia, Bulgaria and Croatia, and topped 80 percent in Ukraine.

"Further, the state's failure to finance benefits under new laws that seek to provide support for mothers and pregnant women in the workforce, as in Croatia and the Ukraine, have made women too expensive to hire," the report adds.

In other countries, the report argues, women have become disproportionately concentrated into the low end of jobs produced through globalisation - notably in export-processing zones which demand "cheap and docile labour that can be used in low-skill, repetitive jobs in unsafe and insecure conditions without minimum guarantees."

NGOs in Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Egypt and Mexico all complained about the effects of the global economy in diminishing women's livelihoods.

"The feminisation of the

labour force begins with women being dispossessed of land and other means of production and being left with only their energy, which cannot be used in their home countries," reports the Malaysian NGO 'Tenaganita'. "This marginalisation intensifies under the process of globalisation and migration."

Several entire economies depend on the profits of overseas women migrant workers, who "suffer gross violations of their human rights, ranging from inhuman working conditions to physical violence, and even rape and murder." Concern for women migrants' labour conditions abroad is particularly strong in the Philippines, which has monitored reports of abuse of domestic workers, especially in the Middle East, the report adds. Adjustment policies at the same time have forced governments to implement policies that conflict with the goals of the Beijing summit, several NGOs argue.

"Chronic budget deficits, internal and external debts, low savings, high inflation rates, combined with political instability, relegate the commitment to women's concerns to the back burner," says 'Shirkat Gah', a Pakistani women's group.

NGOs in 27 of the 88 countries surveyed reported that the budget for women's programmes has grown since the 1995 Beijing conference, but another 28 said that the budget has remained the same while eight reported a decrease. In Germany, the budget for

women's programmes has declined by an average of 20 percent over the past three years, while Guatemala's has fallen by 60 percent over the same period.

Even industrialised countries like Canada have suffered sharp declines: Women's programmes have been slashed by Ottawa from 12 million dollars to 8 million dollars in the past three years, while Canada is second only to Japan among industrialised countries in providing low-wage employment to women.

WEDO is more optimistic about women's progress on other fronts. Sixty-six countries have already set up national offices for women's affairs, the survey says, while 58 have passed new laws or policies addressing women's rights.

Laws to prevent or punish domestic violence were passed in 26 countries, including many Latin American states, China and New Zealand, while Egypt banned female genital mutilation in state-run and private facilities and Thailand clamped down on the trafficking of women and children.

Overall, the report indicates "incremental progress by governments in implementing the Beijing agenda and the growing political strength of women's movements across the world," says Bharati Sadasivam, WEDO programme coordinator for women's rights and organiser of the survey.

Sisters agree to disagree on globalization

The Asian economic crisis has hit women hard, say participants in the 3rd East Asian Women's Forum, held August 23 to 26 in Ulaanbaatar.

It was a conclusion the 192 Mongolian women among the 320 delegates could appreciate — though not as strongly as their counterparts from non-governmental organizations in China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. There, women say their jobs have been the first to go in corporate layoffs, and domestic violence has risen with the economic uncertainty.

But many Mongolian delegates voiced a relatively positive attitude to globalization. It was a sign that, although the conference was an opportunity to build sisterly solidarity, the participants came from very different backgrounds and experiences.

"Although Mongolia presently finds itself only on the outskirts of globalization," said D. Nergui, deputy chair of Mongolia's Liberal Women's Brain Pool (LEOS), which hosted the event, "its effects felt in this country are more on the positive side rather than the negative."

"Economic growth facilitated by globalization creates better opportunities to resolve health, educational and housing problems."

If globalization was the biggest issue at the Forum, the most emotive was violence against women — especially the plight of the so-called "comfort women," Korean women kidnapped into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during the Second World War. The surviving women, now elderly, have been waging a vocal campaign for redress.

"Their courage in breaking the silence overcomes international borders and encourages women in Yugoslavia and Rwanda" said one emotional Japanese delegate before an



Photo by G. SANCHIR

Delegates to the Women's Forum take their call for an end to violence to Government House.

August 26 anti-violence rally that capped the Forum.

The delegates marched from the Children's Palace to Sukhbaatar Square, where they held a silent vigil designed to press the government to act to stop violence against women. The conference urged East Asian governments to ratify the newly founded International Criminal Court in order to create a mechanism to punish crimes against humanity.

It also passed a series of resolutions calling on governments to take steps to improve women's lot. These ranged from the vague and laudable aims of better social protection, job opportunities and business training for women to a potentially controversial call for a quota system to boost women's participation in politics.

The percentage of female legislators in the region ranges from 3 per cent in South Korea to 20 per cent in China. In Mongolia it is 9 per cent.

Some delegates slammed the Mongolian government for not living up to its promises to women.

FEMALE FACTS

Women's share of Mongolia's population: 50.4 per cent

Urban: 54.9 per cent; rural: 45.1 per cent

Under 16 years of age: 33.2 per cent

16-54: 47.4 per cent

55 and over: 9.5 per cent

Women comprise nearly half of those with higher education.

Women make up 363,831 of 756,043 Mongolians in the workforce and 21,308 of 61,504 registered unemployed.

Women account for 175,096 of 373,037 workers in agriculture, hunting and forestry and 6097 of 20,105 mining employees.

Female Members of the State Ikh Hural: 7 of 76.

Female department and office heads in the Justice, Environment, Foreign Affairs, Infrastructure and Health Ministries: 1 each.

In the Finance and Agriculture and Industry Ministries: 3 each.

In the Enlightenment Ministry: None.

"Our government has been ratifying UN-sponsored conventions and has been promising to follow them for decades," said J. Zanaa. "However, the government action does not comply with its promises."

The gathering resolved to hold the 4th East Asian Women's Forum in Taiwan in the year 2000. It is hoped delegates from North Korea, Macao and the Russian far east will attend for the first time.



The Youngest Place on Earth

In post-Communist Mongolia, three-quarters of the population is under the age of 35. Here, amid strip clubs and open markets, Ayn Rand has risen up to ride with Genghis Khan.

By Erik Eckholm Photographs by Kadir van Lohuizen

It is 11:30 P.M. Wednesday night at the Bridge Club, a disco in the center of Ulaan Baatar. A well-heeled crowd of 20- and 30-year-olds dances to Puffy Combs's rap version of "Every Breath You Take." Just about everyone is smartly dressed: the young women in tight jeans and turtlenecks, the men in well-tailored suits. Around midnight, the deejay makes an announcement, and everyone sits down. A bawdy rap song starts up, and a woman who cannot be older than 20 takes the stage and begins to take off her clothes. The audience watches in a manner best described as nonchalant.

Ten years ago, such a scene would have been unimaginable. Until democracy arrived in 1990, Mongolia was literally closed off to the world, isolated not only by tradition and geography but also by a strict, Soviet-dominated regime. With its ancient, nomadic shepherd culture and a Stalinist ethic rooted in the country's 1921 revolution, Mongolia was the land the 20th century forgot.

Mongolians seem to be making up for lost time. And the country's transition to democracy does have some special qualities to it, setting it apart from other ex-Soviet satellites. While most former Communist countries are moving from the 1940's to the modern age, Mongolia is accelerating overnight from a way of life that dates back

to Genghis Khan. More important, the Mongolian revolution is characterized by a stunning demographic youthfulness. Due to Communist efforts in the 1970's to expand a sparse population, a striking three-quarters of Mongolians are under the age of 35; more than half are younger than 21. (In the United States, by contrast, less than a third of the population is under 21.) In part because of this boom, the new Mongolia, at least in its capital city, seems to be a democracy defined by everything Communism was not — free markets, lively media, political instability and sometimes a wild atmosphere reminiscent of Daytona Beach during spring break. Youth culture literally rules.

Back at the Bridge Club, the young woman finishes her act, completely nude. As she walks off the stage, most of the crowd heads back out onto the floor for a slow dance. In this city, which has swiftly created its own version of a Western-style night life, striptease has become old hat. In a competitive wave a couple of years ago, nearly all the city's dozens of clubs — including some like the Top Ten Club that cater to high-school students — suddenly started to offer strip acts.

When several young women are asked about the ubiquity of stripping, none say they actually find the acts enjoyable — but none say they would refuse to go to a bar because of them. Many observe that it



The Young Generation Scenes of a baby-boomer democracy, from left: Waiting for the bus in downtown Ulaan Bataar; growing on Hurd, one of the country's most popular rock groups, at the Kham Bräu Club; and doing business at the Mongolian Stock Exchange, which lists 432 companies

is a way for women to earn better money at a time when jobs are scarce. Zaya, a 24-year-old editor at a radio station who describes herself as a feminist and who like many Mongolians uses only one name, notes that stripping "is better than being a prostitute," adding that "everyone is used to it by now."

WHAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DOMINATE MONGOLIA'S ONLY sizable city and its Government do not seem entirely used to is how to live with unfettered freedom. Not surprisingly, the youth revolution is experiencing growing pains. "Our society was sleeping for a long time," explains Delgermaa, a 39-year-old lawyer and one of the few female members of Parliament. "Everything was prohibited. Now, it's like we're just 8 years old."

To grasp what happened in Mongolia, think back to America in the late 1960's. In those days, the young baby boomers, who trusted no one over 30, wished their generation could just take over the Government and remake institutions according to young people's dreams. In Mongolia, something like that actually took place. In 1990, the 20-ish leaders of the country's baby boom forced the local Communists — whose Soviet sponsors were falling into disarray —

to create a democracy. Charged with Western ideas about freedom and quoting heavily from laissez-faire economists like Vilfredo Pareto, the bright-eyed youngsters formed political parties. In the country's first real elections in 1992, a cautious public elected former Communists who had recoiled themselves as "social democrats." But then in 1996, on their own surprise, the Democratic Coalition, which ran on a platform modeled on the Republican Party's 1994 Contract With America, won big and took over the country.

Today, members of that generation, many in their 30's and some still in their late 20's, run Government ministries and manage the country's traumatic shift from state-sponsored socialism to private enterprise. The average age for a Cabinet minister is just 36.

The country's main political divide — between the Democratic Coalition and the erstwhile Communists of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party — is to a large extent a generation gap as well. "The opposition members are mostly like our fathers," says Saangjaviyn Byambasuren, the 32-year-old Minister of Nature and the Environment. "The younger people want to do things fast, without looking back."

One thing the youngsters have tried to do fast is to wipe out the economic legacy of Communism. Earlier in the decade, livestock



Business as Usual Sangayevyn Boyartsege, above center,

is Minister of Nature and the Environment, and all of 32. Middle: Hurd, a band that mixes Mongolian folk and Western rock, making a video just outside of Ulaan Baatar. Right: Fashion models about to strut their stuff at the Hard Rock nightclub.

herds and small state-owned companies were sold off, with the entire population receiving vouchers, which they could then use to purchase their own modest piece of the action. Since 1996, the process has accelerated: chicken farms, coal mines and trucking companies have all been auctioned off. Now the country is preparing to sell some of the largest state-run enterprises, including the national airline, to a combination of local and foreign investors. Following the advice of the United States and other Western countries that have poured more than \$500 million in aid into Mongolia, the country's young leaders have done away with price controls and abolished tariffs on imports.

The reforms have also brought about inflation, unemployment and the hardships that inevitably follow. The new leaders are the first to admit they were poorly prepared for such complex tasks. "Our democracy is very young and inexperienced," says Amartajgal, an economist who at 37 is the acting Foreign Minister. "We're learning every day. It's on-the-job training."

Not everyone is happy with the learning curve. There is growing discontent among the well educated, many of whom, despite advanced degrees, find themselves underemployed or unemployed. "There is also unhappiness among those who ventured to Ulaan Baatar from the Mongolian outback, where some 40 percent of the population, largely nomadic, remains. To walk around the city's sprawling and rough "ger districts" — a ger is the traditional tentlike home of canvas and thick felt — is to sense the disappointment. Many of the

Erik Eckholm is The Times's Beijing bureau chief.

city's young people cannot afford to go to discos or to drink at places like the Elvis Bar or the Boeing 777 in the modern part of town. A few low-rent bars and strip shows have opened in the ger districts, but many of the young men gather in dirt alleys to play cards and drink cheap beer and vodka. (At night, a police van drives about scooping up passed-out drunks to prevent them from freezing to death.) Street urchins haunt the city's steam tunnels. Young Mongolian women have flooded into China to work as prostitutes.

"Our people are not yet aware of all the dangers of extreme openness," says Hashtbaa Hulan, 37. A member of Parliament, she notes the connection between the strip shows and spreading prostitution on one side, and rising social ills like divorce and out-of-wedlock births on the other. In 1997, according to Government figures, in this country of just 2.3 million, 38,000 girls age 16 and under were unwed mothers. Sexually transmitted diseases are soaring, and AIDS has just started to appear.

In the last year, although the economy started to show some signs of life, things began to sour politically. Factionalism among the Democrats became more bitter and evidence appeared of corruption and cronyism in high places. Perhaps this was inevitable in a country where newly minted leaders were inventing a democracy from scratch. No one, however, expected the tensions to lead to violence. But that appears to be what happened last month, when 36-year-old Sanjaasuren Zorig, a founder of the pro-democracy movement, was knifed to death by unidentified assailants only hours after it became clear that he would be named the country's next Prime Minister. Zorig was univer-

Mongols, Told to Use Surnames Again, Are Trying to Remember

July 1, 1998

By Thomas Crampton International Herald Tribune

KARAKORUM, Mongolia - Sipping a bowl of fermented mare's milk inside his tent on the windswept plains of central Mongolia, D. Shatar proudly tells of the traditions he will pass down to the next generation.

Like his father and grandfather before him, he will teach his son how to care for yaks, shoot arrows, wrestle and use an uurga - the Mongolian lasso - to capture wild horses.

"It is very important to keep our old way of life and our Mongolian identity," the nomadic herdsman said.

There is, however, one key item of ancestral knowledge that Mr. Shatar doesn't know but will soon be required to learn - his family name.

After getting by on a first-name basis for more than 60 years, Mongolians this week are supposed to start using surnames again. If only they can find out what they were.

In what must be one of the largest genealogical projects ever undertaken, all of Mongolia's 2.5 million citizens have been ordered to search for their roots.

The deadline for using three names on legal documents - one's surname, given name and the father's name - is Wednesday. But the government sees months, if not years, of research ahead.

The names were banished along with many other aspects of Mongolian culture by the Soviet-backed Communist government that came to power in 1924. The suppression of names was intended to crush allegiances that might supersede loyalty to the state.

Along with killing monks, razing temples and banning Mongolian script, the Communists confiscated the centuries-old family trees that central Asian nomads had sewn into silk or written on parchment.

Now the entire population of Mongolia uses only first names, adding the initial of their father's first name for formal occasions and on official documents. As a result, few Mongolians know their ancestral family names.

In addition to destroying family ties, government officials said the suppression of surnames has led to an increased incidence of genetic diseases due to inadvertent incest. In the years since the Soviet empire collapsed and free elections took place in 1990, Mongolians have taken great pleasure in steadily reclaiming their national identity.

"Before, we had a very dangerous situation but now I have very strong feelings about using my full name and passing it on to my son," Mr. Shatar said, adding that he hopes his father can still recall the family name.

So few people are ready for the change to last names that the government has opted for a phased introduction of the

names rule over the next year, said Ts. Tsedev, head of Mongolia's Civil Registration and Information agency.

Mr. Tsedev has been leading a campaign on national television to assist the recovery of names.

"Older generations often remember family names, so I encourage people to go back to their parents or grandparents," said Mr. Tsedev, who first learned his family name seven years ago and has been obsessed with genealogy ever since.

In his spare time Mr. Tsedev has helped compile what he calls the world's most complete list of Mongolian names.

He hopes the list of 1,300 names, organized by region, will help jog faded memories. "People can look for the village where their family came from, see the names and maybe remember what they were called," he said. Those who can't figure out their family name or don't want to be bothered, can adopt any name they choose.

While trying to allay concerns that a significant portion of Mongolia's population will adopt the family name of the national hero, Genghis Khan, Mr. Tsedev said relatives of the country's cosmonaut were certain to prefer the name "Gurragchaa."

"I am sure they will be so happy to call themselves all Gurragchaa and have the name of the first Mongolian who went in space," Mr. Tsedev said.

Prime Minister Ts. Elbegdorj said family names slow the rise of crime and increase social responsibility.

But not everyone is ready for a full disclosure. One Mongolian claiming aristocratic ancestry said a lifetime of discrimination had made her father reluctant to reveal their true family history.

When she inquired about the family's name for the first time last year, her father spoke emotionally in low tones, telling of his capture by Communists while carrying the hallmarks of an aristocrat.

After generations of ruling a large portion of Mongolia's southwestern Hovd Province, the woman's grandfather fled to China on horseback with his family and thousands of servants in advance of Communist revolutionaries, she recounted.

While on his deathbed in exile, the grandfather passed his riding boots, hat denoting the family's aristocratic rank and the family tree to his son, commanding him to recover their ancestral land.

The son, while riding across the Gobi Desert, was captured by Communists who recognized and confiscated his aristocratic possessions.

He was said to have been imprisoned for months and kept unemployed for years while his wife, a Russian-educated doctor, was forbidden to practice medicine. "My mother has a loud voice so she finally found work singing in the state opera," the woman said.

Profile

Spiritual Statesman

An ageing lama mounts a campaign to restore
Buddhist piety to Mongolia
By Lincoln Kaye

12/25/1997

Far Eastern Economic Review

Page 130

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At age 80 -- or 2,500 -- plus, if you add in all 18 of his prior incarnations --

Kushok Bakula is starting to show his years. His knees have given out from decades of cross-legged meditation. He hobbles painfully with an aluminium walker, a sad come-down for a once active man.

Bakula has come a long way from his native Ladakh, India's high-desert enclave north of Kashmir. Now he spends most of his time enthroned in his bedroom at the Indian embassy in Ulan Bator, where he serves as ambassador.

Most of his steady stream of visitors -- wild herdsman, ochre-robed monks, politicians -- come not on diplomatic business, though, but for spiritual guidance. As postcommunist Mongolia recovers from 70 years of anti-clerical pogroms, Bakula reigns as the country's most exalted "living buddha." The Dalai Lama has named him a reincarnation of one of the 16 disciples of Sakyamuni, the founder of the Buddhist faith.

His spiritual rank puts Bakula at the head of the Buddhist revival that has swept Mongolia since it shed communism eight years ago. But though volunteers rebuild ruined temples and thousands of youths take monastic vows, "true religion still faces an uphill struggle," sighs Bakula with a worried shake of his bulbous, ashen head. For Mongolia's haves, economic liberalization has "unleashed unbridled greed," he complains. For its have-nots, it brings idleness, crime and alcoholism. Meanwhile, Christian missionaries aggressively drum up converts.

To halt the rot, Bakula now aligns himself with Mongolia's "least progressive forces," according to journalist Arten Gerla of the weekly *Xox Tolb* (Blue Spot). While steering clear of politics as such, the living buddha numbers among his more prominent disciples N. Enkhbayar, new chairman of the resurgent Communist Party, and Dashbalbar Ochirbat, the jingoist poet and parliamentary gadfly. "These people are retreads from the old power structure," Gerla points out. "By associating with them, Bakula has come full circle from his one-time role in easing Mongolia's transition away from communism."

Not that Bakula was ever that staunchly anti-communist to begin with. Back when India was a Soviet client, he often starred in the colourful chorus lines of friendly clergy that Moscow and its allies would invite to Potemkin religious conferences to showcase Eastern Bloc ecumenicism. He had already visited Ulan Bator several times. So, out of socialist solidarity, India's late Premier Rajiv Gandhi sent the Mongolian regime its old friend Bakula as ambassador in 1990. A month after his arrival, though, mass demonstrations toppled the dictatorship -- the first Soviet domino to fall. On the eve of their street action, protest leaders came to Bakula for his priestly blessing. That was the start of his dual life as a diplomat and spiritual arbiter.

Since then, the ageing lama has mounted a one-man crusade to restore Buddhist piety to Central Asia. "Monasteries, libraries and shrines have to be rebuilt," he roars. "But most urgent is the restoration of clerical discipline." Monks have grown lax. Many even marry. Stalinist persecutions wiped out the incarnation images of Mongolia's own high lamas. New ones must be found and ordained. Early on, Bakula could roam Mongolia on horseback, whipping up meetings in remote outposts. Now that his legs have given out, he confines himself to institution-building. He will soon open postcommunist Mongolia's first live-in Buddhist seminary. He also keeps in touch with clerics in Russia's ethnically Mongol enclaves of Tuva and Buryatiya. And, when he stops in Beijing en route to

(See next page)



or from Ulan Bator, he meets with Buddhists from China and Tibet.

Born a prince in Ladakh's royal palace, Bakula spent 14 years studying for his Geyche (Doctor of Divinity) degree in Lhasa, where he first met the current Dalai Lama as a junior classmate. Upon returning to Ladakh as chief lama, just before Partition, Bakula steered his Buddhist realm away from Muslim Pakistan and into secular India. He soon found himself bogged down in the politics of Kashmir, of which Ladakh became a district. "New Delhi politicians all too readily ignore Buddhist interests," Bakula complains. They hope to defuse secessionist sentiment by appeasing Kashmir's Muslim majority, he says. Bakula has represented Ladakh both in the Kashmir assembly and India's national parliament. He was a confidant of India's founding premier, Jawaharlal Nehru, from the trauma of Partition to the Chinese invasion of Ladakh in 1962. (A chunk of easternmost Ladakh still remains in Chinese hands.) When the Dalai Lama and his entourage fled to India, Bakula mediated between the Tibetan exile regime in Dharamsala and New Delhi officialdom.

Yet he has had his differences with the Dalai Lama, too. In the 1980s, fighting broke out between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh. Flouting the Dalai Lama's plea for peace, Bakula egged on the Buddhist militants. And in Mongolia, he's at ease with the resurgent cult of Dorje Shugden, a schismatic deity whose worship the Dalai Lama has banned. Sometimes Dharamsala loses sight of non-Tibetan redoubts like Ladakh and Mongolia, Bakula sighs. "Tibet is Tibet and Buddhism is Buddhism. They're not necessarily one and the same."

Strong as a Yak:
The World-Straddling, Ever-Victorious Titan
Is a Mongolian icon
By Lincoln Kaye

10/09/1997

Far Eastern Economic Review

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Now that postcommunist athletics have been privatized, modern-day wrestlers in Mongolia can win incomparably more money than Darin Damden's 15,000 tugrik (\$19.10) monthly pension. But no living sportsman in this wrestling-mad state commands more respect than the 67-year-old ex-champ.

"He's still No. 1 in our hearts," enthuses Mongolian Philharmonic director Danzanvaanchig Ukhnaa, a fervent wrestling fan. "Mongols may differ about all kinds of topics. But everyone agrees that Titen Damden's the unrivalled Grand Old Man of wrestling."

Damden's judgment as an umpire is undisputed. Aspiring wrestlers beseech him for pointers. His deadpan face peers from calendars in nearly every yurt in the land. Just to address him by his proper title can be pretty breathtaking: Dalai Daying Dayar Dorsajdakh Darkhan Avarag (The Great Ocean of Talent, World-Straddling, Famed Among Champions, Ever-Victorious Titan).

Such accolades hardly came easy. Loosening up over half a bottle of Genghis Khan vodka, Damden reminisces about growing up the hard way. As a child in Hovsgal province on the Russian border, he was born with a few counts already against him. Not only did he belong to the oppressed minority Buriyat tribe, but he also hailed from a "counter-revolutionary" family that included several high lamas. His father and a couple of uncles were killed in the purges of 1937, leaving Damden as the sole supporter of his widowed mother.

Besides single-handedly tending the family flocks, he had to earn extra income as a stevedore on the lake barges from Russia. He reached adulthood functionally illiterate, but strong as a yak.

His brute strength, though, cut no ice at first with his officers when he was drafted into the Mongolian army. Thanks to his "bad background," Damden spent his first year of military service assigned to latrine duty. He consoled himself by practising weight-lifting. His prowess soon came to the attention of his commanders.

They enrolled him at age 20 to represent his military unit in the annual Nadaam national wrestling tournament, the pinnacle of the Mongolian sporting year. With no time limit on matches, wrestlers can stay locked together for hours before one finally flips the other. The nine-round tourney takes at least two days.

To outsiders, it looks like an endless series of beefcake clinches. To Mongols, though, Nadaam is full of passion and poetry, the field of dreams where anyone can prevail by sheer force of character and physique, as Damden's rise illustrates.

His first time out, Damden made the semifinals, an astonishing performance for a novice. The next year, he made the finals. The year after that, he reigned supreme, besting an opponent nearly half again his 100-kilogram weight and strong enough to lift a camel.

With fame came "fortune." Damden was recruited as a Strongman by the National Circus, one of Mongolia's premier cultural institutions. The circus job stood him in good stead even after he lost his wrestling crown, five years later -- to an opponent a head taller and 13 years his junior. "All champions must fall sooner or later," Damden shrugs. "But at least I had steady work by then. I had a car, a government flat, lots of new friends and plenty of status." Indeed, it was creditable social mobility for an unlettered lummo who'd been a pariah coolie just a few years before.

He proudly displays a creased black-and-white photo of his circus act. It shows him braced in the middle of the big-top as the sole support of an inverted pyramid comprising five acrobats and three barbells -- a total load of 850 kilograms.

It was in this posture that he first met his wife, a petite Mongolian literature teacher who caught his eye in the bleachers. The couple have three sons and a daughter. Only the eldest boy has shown any interest in wrestling, having made it to the "Elephant" class (the national finals). The other two sons have gone into business for themselves; one is a trader, the other a restaurateur. The daughter works as a Japanese translator.

Damden's not at all disappointed with his children's career choices.

"Wrestling's not for everyone, least of all these days.

It used to be even a middling wrestler could count on a livable stipend as a coach or umpire. Not any more. Now, the top champions get fabulously rich with prizes in cash and kind. They live in big villas and their private lives get written up in the papers -- something unimaginable in my time.

"But all the also-rans in the tournament get next to nothing for their pains.

Still they keep on flocking to the sport. So many young men are jobless these days, and the few top wrestling success stories hold out a false promise of easy money."



ASIAN TRAVEL

By LESLIE CHANG

The Milk of Kindness Flows in a Peculiar Land A Steppe From Nowhere

THE DAILY FLIGHT from Beijing was full, and the trip organizer's advice less than helpful. "Can you get yourself to Irkutsk?" he asked.

Mongolia is at the end of the world, with even the Siberian city of Irkutsk a transport hub in comparison. And the living is not easy when you get there: Showers are mostly cold, mutton — in a land where sheep outnumber humans six to one — is on offer at every meal, and expatriates send their suits



abroad to be dry-cleaned. But for the hardy traveler, Mongolia offers quirky charm, generous hospitality, and vast stretches of grassy steppe and velvety green mountains in the most sparsely populated nation on Earth.

Long a blank spot on many maps — for centuries under Chinese domination, then a Soviet satellite for seven decades until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 — Mongolia is waking up to its tourism potential. The country drew 16,000 tourists last year, and hopes to boost that figure by 25% this year. Tourism already is one of the impoverished country's biggest foreign-exchange earners.

Local tourist agencies, through a network of Internet sites, offer everything from do-it-yourself horseback treks to the "Be Genghis Khan for a Day" camp, where you can dress up as the country's 13th-century leader, complete with ancient weaponry. Mongolia has even become a draw for jet-setters, who helicopter in to hunt gazelles or wild boar in the wilderness.

The flight to Ulan Bator, the nation's capital, is a promise of things to come. Passengers on national carrier Mongolian Airlines are handed a meat-and-butter sandwich shrink-wrapped with a personal bottle of Mongolian vodka. On the customs line for one visit were a smattering of backpackers and a man carrying a cardboard crate labeled "Human Eyes — Do Not Freeze." (He turned out to be with Orbis International, the charity group that provides eye care and education to developing countries.) At the airport, several skinny horses grazed at the edge of the parking lot.

ULAN BATOR was a village until it was deemed a capital city by Soviet planners, who arrived following the Mongolian revolution of 1921. Their hand is plainly visible. The city's wide streets are lined with peeling Stalinist buildings. Statues of Lenin still dot Ulan Bator, and a huge stone monument to Soviet-Mongolian friendship graces a hill on the city's southern outskirts.

Yet the city offers a surprising array of attractions, from impressive Buddhist monasteries making a comeback after years of official suppression, to museums containing everything from dinosaur bones unearthed in the Gobi Desert to relics documenting the years of Soviet repression. For kitsch and cashmere, head to the cavernous State Department Store, where nearly empty shelves and surly employees attest to the communist past the country is fast leaving behind.

Entertainment offerings reflect the city's offbeat nature, with many of the venues started by outsiders who seem to have gotten stranded on the way to somewhere else. There is a Japanese restaurant set up by North Korean entrepreneurs, an African cafe run by natives of Cameroon, and even a Czech-Mongolian microbrewery with decent beer on tap. A German-invested casino purports to attract gamblers from neighboring China, but seems to rely on Mongolian high rollers trying their luck at blackjack and roulette.

Public transport is a cinch. Any vehicle is a potential taxi, and almost any passing car will deliver you to your destination for about 25 cents a kilometer. "I've been picked up by civilian

ambulances, military ambulances, even a 10-ton truck that drove me home once from a presidential reception," says Sheldon Severinghaus, an American resident of the city since 1993.

No visit to Mongolia is complete without a road trip to the Gobi Desert, although the term "road trip" might be a stretch. Outside the main city, there are no road signs and no roads — just tire tracks crisscrossing the vast steppe into oblivion. Drivers navigate on a combination of memory and bravado, which translated on a recent visit into a bone-jarring 16-hour drive, two flat tires and a great deal of backtracking.

OFFSETTING the travails of the journey is the famed hospitality of the steppe. Approach any *ger* — the circular felt tent that is home to nomadic herders and resembles a squashed cupcake — and you will be warmly welcomed. Guests are offered a variety of dishes that all appear to emanate from a huge vat of cow's milk sitting by the fire — fresh milk, milk tea, milk curds and a hard, salty cheese. For special occasions, a lamb is slaughtered and choice bits of entrails like lung and liver are offered to honored guests.

Tourists can enjoy the ger experience firsthand, thanks to the growing number of ger camps catering to visitors — many of them from Japan, which might explain the karaoke bars in many of the camps. It's a good idea to get your bearings before braving the rural nightlife; stumbling around in the Mongolian night leads to the startling discovery that all gers look the same.

A visit to the countryside provides a snapshot of the transition to a free market that has resulted in an odd mix of poverty and progress. At the home of one prosperous herder in the southern Gobi, the prize possession is a satellite dish, purchased in a package with a television and a generator for about \$1,000. A daughter named Surenjav, 19 years old, says she particularly likes the motorcycle and auto races on the Star TV network, even though she doesn't understand the Mandarin Chinese commentary. "Of course, it's much better to have a television, to be more informed about how people live," she says, holding the halter of a wild horse she caught that morning.

Mongolie

Les bouddhistes sortent des catacombes

Sept ans après la chute de l'empire soviétique, les Mongols renouent avec le lamaïsme. Cent cinquante monastères ont été rouverts.

OULAN-BATOR :
Florence COMPAIN

Dambadarjaa, le mécanicien, a gardé son secret pendant plus de cinquante ans. « Je craignais pour ma vie et pour celle de mes proches », explique ce vieil homme de quatre-vingt-deux ans, vêtu d'une robe safran crasseuse et rapiécée. En 1990, la Mongolie se libère de soixante-dix ans de joug soviétique. Dambadarjaa, père de dix enfants et membre du Parti communiste, sort alors de son coffre cadenassé des livres liturgiques et révèle aux siens qu'il est un moine bouddhiste.

« En Mongolie, la foi bouddhiste est comme une plante que l'on n'aurait pas arrosée pendant de longues années. Elle est faible, mais elle n'est pas morte », explique l'ambassadeur d'Inde à Oulan-Bator, Kushok Bakula, lui-même moine et ami du dalaï-lama.

Dambadarjaa évoque la répression : cent mille tués (sur sept cent cinquante mille habitants), sept cent cinquante temples rasés. « Voilà tout ce qui reste du temple Kongacholing, constate-t-il tristement, en désignant un poteau de bois. Et dire qu'ils ont osé faire de Dashchoiling, le plus vieux monastère d'Oulan-Bator, un cirque ! »

En août 1937, le Parti communiste lance l'opération « Application créatrice du marxisme-léninisme ». « J'avais vingt et un ans, se souvient Dambadarjaa. La police a arrêté les moines les plus influents. Seuls trois ou quatre ont survécu. Les jeunes ont été obligés de se défroquer et de se marier. » Dambadarjaa devient mécanicien. « Je n'ai ja-



Bouddhiste mongole en costume traditionnel à Oulan-Bator.
(Photo Halasz/Reuter.)

mais oublié les enseignements religieux, mais jamais je n'aurais imaginé pouvoir redevenir bonze », dit-il.

En 1961, un ancien ami du monastère lui propose de braver l'interdit. Les anciens disciples de Kongacholing se réunissent en secret. « C'est au prix d'extrêmes précautions que nous pouvions réciter des prières. Il y avait toujours quelqu'un qui était chargé de faire le guet. Nous quittions le lieu de réunion l'un après l'autre. A chaque fois, je fournissais à ma femme une bonne excuse. Le plus souvent, je lui disais que j'allais boire un verre de qumis (du lait fermenté) ou d'arkhi (la vodka locale) », raconte-t-il en riant.

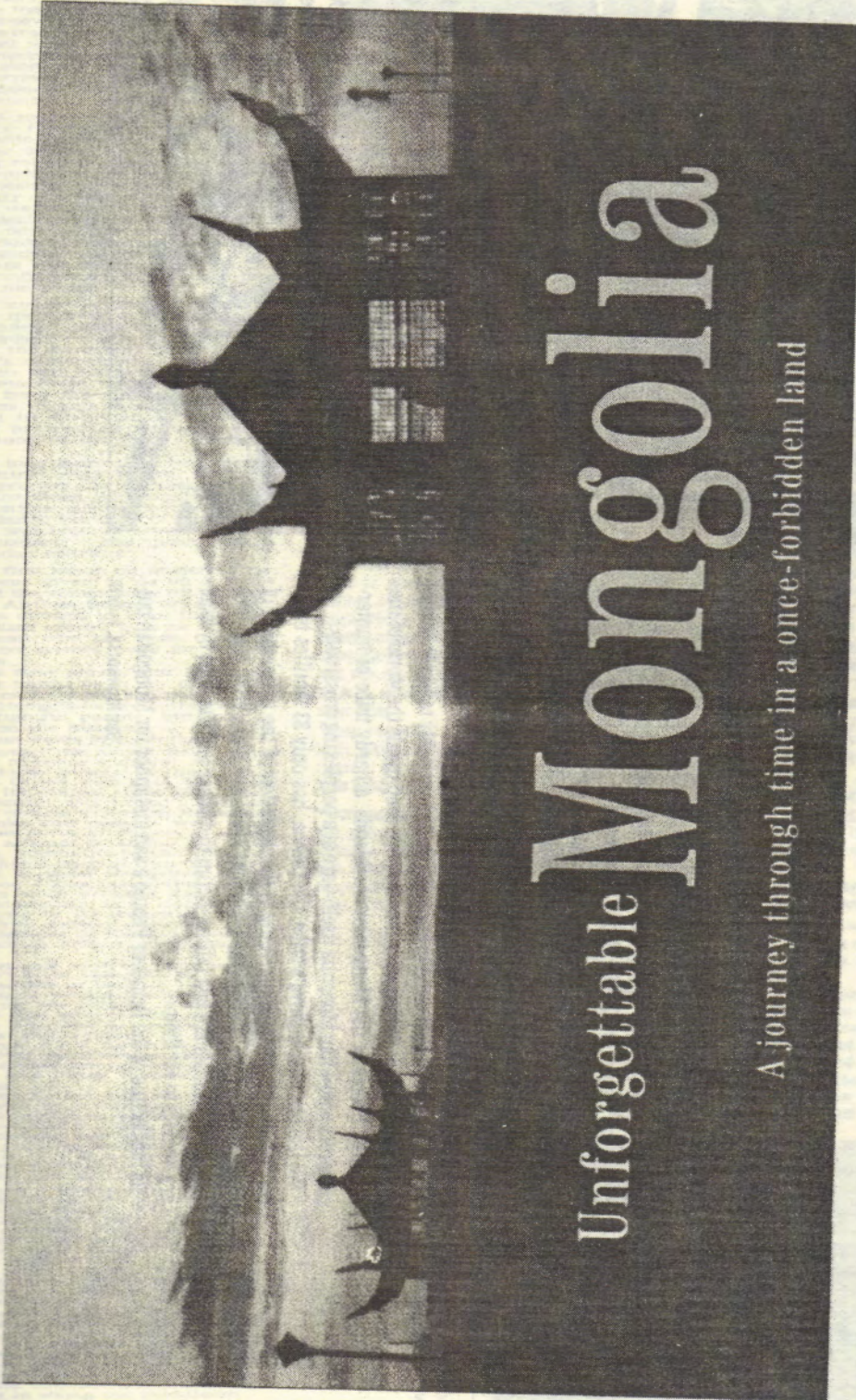
Le soutien du dalaï-lama

En quête d'identité, la Mongolie renoue aujourd'hui avec le lamaïsme, une forme de bouddhisme pratiquée également au Tibet. Cent cinquante monastères ont été rouverts. Leur fréquentation ne cesse d'augmenter. « J'incline la tête devant des photos et des peintures, mais je ne sais pas toujours pourquoi, avoue un jeune homme. Je sais que je suis bouddhiste parce que je suis mongol, mais quelqu'un doit m'enseigner comment être un bon bouddhiste. On nous a tellement répété que c'est le gouvernement, et non les dieux, qui nous donne du pain. »

« La foi est nécessaire, mais elle n'est pas suffisante, il faut la connaissance », met en garde l'ambassadeur indien, Kushok Bakula. C'est pourquoi Dambadarjaa et les derniers maîtres du lamaïsme se dépêchent de transmettre leur savoir. Sur les deux mille bonzes que compte actuellement la Mongolie, près de la moitié ont plus de soixante-dix ans. « Nous ne sommes pas assez nombreux, et j'ai oublié tant de choses, soupire Dambadarjaa. Mais nous pouvons compter sur les visites régulières du dalaï-lama et des moines tibétains. »

Quand il erre sur les collines surplombant Oulan-Bator, dans l'espoir de retrouver les objets de culte qu'il avait enterrés il y a plus de cinquante ans, Dambadarjaa rêve de reconstruire Kongacholing, « le monastère le plus réputé de Mongolie ».

F. C.



Unforgettable Mongolia

A journey through time in a once-forbidden land

Culture
and Society

(See next page)

"Our experiences took on a somewhat dreamlike quality, as if we had arrived on a planet similar to Earth, but wilder and more beautiful and in a state of cultural innocence..."

—Christopher Leahy,
Massachusetts Audubon Society

Story and photos by **Michael and Liliann McGuire**
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

LAKE HOVSGOL, Mongolia — We had to look hard down the slope from our Russian jeep to spot them. Their shapes blended in perfectly with the sun-streaked birch and larches that composed their summer home. Then one by one, the reindeer of Hovsgol came into view, their felt-clad antlers, bobbing against the brown forest floor, giving them away.

An instant later, a large gray tepee spotlighted by a shaft of sunlight appeared. A figure with broad, ruddy cheeks emerged from the doorway and stooped to brush woodland dust off the hem of her dark blue, ankle-length gown.

Ingtoya, as we would come to know her, called out softly to her children as we approached. Within moments we were deep inside the world of the Reindeer People of the Mongolian northlands, a hardy tribe of hunter-gatherers who—like Mongolia itself—are at a perplexing crossroads.

We learned that Ingtoya's tribe, the Dukha, has only 33 families totaling 180 people. What is alarming is the depletion of the tribe's herd of reindeer, which in 1990 totaled 1,500; now there are fewer than 600. The legendary animals are fast falling victim to disease and the need by hungry herders to eat them.

Is the decline of the Reindeer People a sad metaphor for Mongolian cul-

SEE MONGOLIA, PAGE 9



From an enchanted sunrise in the southern Gobi (top) to northern skies that compete with lake water for primeval freshness, Mongolia floods the senses. A yak (above) lumbers toward Lake Hovsgol.



Once abundant, Mongolia's reindeer are victims of disease and the need of impoverished herders to slaughter them for the table.



Kneeling inside her tepee, Ingtoya offers warm tea diluted with reindeer milk.

(See next page)

Mongolia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ture itself. Can the nation's millennia-old nomadic nature and tradition continue, or will the false promise of a better life in the city prove irresistible? Today, some 40 percent of Mongolia's 2.4 million population are nomads surviving off 30 million head of camels, sheep, horses and yak as did their ancestors, who in the 13th Century began their conquest of most of the then-known world.

Theirs was the life we had wanted to see before the cities of this once-forgotten land expanded even more with emigrants from the countryside, and before the inevitable flocks of tourists began to flood the country in swelling numbers.

Our journey to Mongolia — a 12-day tour arranged through Nomadic Expeditions (see If You Go for details) — thrust us deep into a relatively unchanged, forgotten world that so far only a few American travelers have sought to see. By the end of our second week, we had sat with the Mongols and slept in round tents made of white felt that are known as *gers*. We drank yak-milk tea in the pristine, endless steppes of the north and ate spit-cooked mutton and camel-milk cheese in the Gobi Desert to the south.

We coaxed ragtag camels to carry us across arid sands and persuaded rugged horses to trot along the banks of perhaps the world's cleanest lake. We sat on wooden benches in monasteries recovering from the disaster of seven decades of communism, and we stared in disbelief at dinosaur bones protruding from the soft sandstone of the Gobi's Flaming Cliffs.

Our long journey to the steppes of Central Asia began, perhaps appropriately, in Beijing, not far from the Great Wall that stretches 1,500 miles across north China from Gansu province to the Yellow Sea. It was built, of course, to keep off invaders — like those ancient Mongolian warriors.

Our first lesson on modern Mongolia was given to us on a flight aboard the comfortable MIAT-Mongolian Airlines Boeing 727 that carried us onward to Ulan Bator, the Mongolian capital. It came from an American who had been teaching American science there for several months.

The first phrase our language teacher taught us to say in Mongolian was "I am not a Russian," he said. "Mongolians are extraordinarily beautiful people, but they're afraid of Russia. They don't want to go to the U.S."

Although the nation never came under Moscow's direct rule, the Soviet Union had kept Mongolia under its control since 1921, when revolution was brutally imposed on the nation. Countless thousands of monks and nomads were slain or taken north to Siberia, and the attempt to stamp out Buddhism, domesticate the nomads and alter Mongolian script, and even books containing family records were destroyed. Mongolia is a democracy struggling in its transition to an open, free-market economy after decades of Kremlin domination which effectively ended in 1989.

As we learned up front that outsiders don't go to Mongolia to wallow in its culture or bask in its history, we were sent a Michelin Agent waiting for the airport. You'll find him in the city. "The great thing is that after in the cities, you can see a real state in their own image, the Soviets destroyed Ulan Bator with the same kind of atrocious apartment blocks, found deteriorating across the city and other former Soviet cities."

As we entered the city are greeted by a collection of grim faces, and so horrendous in fact that a young Mongolian accompanying our bus into town said, "This is a Russian practical joke. The prevailing winds carry the smell of the city."

A day's sightseeing in Ulan Bator included the remarkable 17th-century Gandan Monastery, a "complete joy." Hundreds of their yellow shirts covered the roofs and here and there, a red and white flag flared. The Magid House, which is the 25-foot statue of the founder of the city.

The original statue of gold and silver was dismantled and melted in 1937 by the Soviets. The statue was dismantled and melted in 1937 by the Soviets. The statue was dismantled and melted in 1937 by the Soviets.

As we went to the west, we saw a landscape containing thousands of the best-looking housing of the steppes. The steppes are a beautiful work of art.

As we went to bring their sheep with them, Namjil, the chairman of the stationery



Warm gers in the steppes shelter nomads from subzero cold and blistering sun.

Party, told us later. "They are bringing their domestic animals here and have begun to fight with each other over very limited pasture space to graze their animals; thousands of sheep, thousands of goats, horses. Outside the city they would live in harmony with each other."

We would begin to experience that harmony the next day, when we journeyed through time into the Mongolian north.

There are advantages to the intimidating, half-century-old Russian AN-24 prop job that flew us to the Lake Hovsgol area near the Siberian border. Despite its appearance, the wings didn't fall off and it flew at a conveniently low altitude. From its cruising height a few thousand feet above the ground, the terrain below looked like an endless stretch of arid, desert doom.

The only visible sign of life was the rows of grooves, sometimes a dozen or more parallel to one another, cut into hard sand by tough trucks, jeeps, horses or camels, virtually the only ground transportation between cities in a land with only 600 miles of paved roads — nearly all of it in the major cities.

Soon carpets of the grassier lands, lush pines and mountain ridges of the Mongolian northlands began to unfold.

Our guide in the north, Tsozolmaa, preferred to be called by her nickname, Dodo. A walking textbook of lore from the desert and steppes, she spent six years in the 1980s in one of Moscow's most



A few strokes with a pocketknife uncover the promise of dinosaur bones (white object above) in the Gobi's Flaming Cliffs.

cloud of dust. But there was other traffic.

Now and then, a pair of riders on the famous steeds that once carried the conquering hordes across Asia and Eastern Europe crossed the plains ahead of us. With their pointed hats, boots with curled-up toes and colorful delis (knee-length tunics buttoned at the right shoulder and tied with a brightly colored sash), they were like a blurred image as they challenged the winds at speeds Montana wranglers could only dream of.

Eventually, as we climbed toward a distant mountain chain along a crystal river, the rutted dirt track became a rutted dirt road. But ancient travelers had had it worse.

"Chinese merchants traveling the old Silk Road would take a detour and come past here," Dodo told us as we surveyed the steep drop into a deep green valley. "Bandits would waylay them. They'd rob them and kill them and throw their bodies into the abyss below."

Awaiting us at the lake was a cluster of 23 *gers*, one of several

such camps in Mongolia. Maranchimeg, who with her husband, Purevdorj, operates the camp as part of their Hovsgol Travel Co., welcomed us.

The interiors of the comfortable *gers* (available to independent travelers for \$40 per *ger*, per day) were laid out with two or more beds, bright red chests of drawers and other furnishings surrounding a wood-burning iron stove in the center.

"We had 400 guests this year," Maranchimeg told us during our visit early last fall, confirming that the region is hardly overrun by tourists. "That's up from 100 five years ago. They come from Germany, Switzerland, Japan and Korea, with some from the U.S."

Above the camp, sheltered high in the hills, were the Reindeer People.

It was there that we met Ingtoya, 49, who told us (Dodo interpreted) about this life on the extreme and her five children, four girls and a boy, ages 7 to 25.

"We're about to pull up and move further north for the winter," she said as cool September



Chicago Tribune/David Jarritz

breezes played with the larch branches overhead. Outside her tepee, several long-eared reindeer coughed repeatedly — a sign of brucellosis, a bacterial disease that can strike systems weakened by years of inbreeding.

"We'll find a place in the mountains 12 days away where the moss and lichens are better for our herd. The reindeer like it there, pushing their heads through the snow always looking for the better moss. But we'll have to keep moving our location every five or so weeks."

Is life tough there?

"It can get 45 below. We spread reindeer skins over our blankets. My husband hunts — rabbits, fox; there's even wolves and boar there. We take along some rice and flour we buy from the village."

But with food and the funds to buy it scarce, many of the nomads of the mountains have begun to consume the reindeer that they have depended on for centuries for milk, leather, transportation and hunting excursions into areas too rough to access otherwise.

If they continue to lose the reindeer (through consuming them and disease) at the current rate, in three or four years they will have no more. Without the reindeer, they will be forced to move to the city to survive, and their way of life will disappear.

■ ■ ■

Some 600 miles to the south, in the heart of the Gobi Desert, a geologist and paleontologist named Chimedtseren basks in his nickname as "the Human GPS." (GPS is a global positioning device that pinpoints locations with the help of satellites.)

So how did Chimedtseren, who also works as an expedition specialist for Nomadic Expeditions, develop his reputation for finding his way around?

"Mongolians are nomads," he told us. "Most of us are born with this navigational sense. I've been traveling in the desert and steppes for 20 years. I'm familiar with almost all of the mountains and hills and can distinguish among them. I tend to rely on ground features and, of course, the stars and the sun, when you can see them. But if there is no sun . . ."

We had reached the Gobi, an arc-shaped desert a thousand

miles long, by flying back to Ulan Bator, then taking another AN-24 over one of the world's most barren plains. We arrived at a dirt strip in Dalanzadgad, where Russian troops once landed to take up positions on the border with China, about 250 miles to the south.

From there, we took an old Russian school bus northwest to a *ger* camp used in Soviet times by Mongolia's party elite and their Warsaw Pact guests.

The next day, as we drove to the legendary dinosaur fields of the Flaming Cliffs, our bus left the track so we could race across the hard-packed sand after a pack of fragile-looking gazelles.

Then we came upon a herd of camels — and met Gelegrash.

Gelegrash wasted no time inviting us into the collapsible desert *ger* he shared with his wife, Baljinhuu, and 21-year-old daughter, Munjiy. With a herd of 70 camels, 65 horses, and 400 goats and sheep, Baljinhuu and Gelegrash were relatively rich by nomad standards.

Inside their typical *ger* — a bastion here against the desert winds and cold — were altars of Buddhist figures, family photographs and personal mementos. Saddles and a leather bag with fermenting horse milk hung near the door, right next to a toothbrush rack. The hands on an old clock accurately put the time at 12:42.

"Stay a while and we'll have fresh biscuits," said Baljinhuu, through our interpreter as Munjiy began to knead flour, melted beef fat and sugar into dough. "Later we can slaughter a sheep and have a roast. Stay the night."

Though we couldn't stay the night (and politely declined the lamb), we sat on oriental rugs as we ate the biscuits, drank a concoction of tea and nibbled gently on a chunk of rock-hard camel-milk cheese. Unable to finish the cheese, we put it in a pocket of one of our khaki vests and forgot about it.

We also accepted a long ride on Gelegrash's two-humped Bactrian camels to a point within sight of the Flaming Cliffs, site of a great calamity 70 million years ago.

Later, on the bus, we went back to Flaming Cliffs. Nobody knows exactly how all these animals died (one theory: heavy rains, followed by a sand slide), but today this



Camelherder Gelegrash uncovers his snuff bottle inside the *ger* he shares with his family in the Gobi Desert.

ruddy badlands burial ground — discovered only in 1921 — may be the best dinosaur-age field in the world. It was here that dinosaur eggs were first discovered.

Bones of ancient beasts are strewn throughout the sandstone cliffsides and floors. Every probe into the soft matrix with the blade of a Swiss Army knife appeared to uncover yellowish fragments of what might have been an oviraptor or velociraptor.

Before leaving the Gobi, we also visited the haunting site of Yolyn Am (the Vulture's Mouth). Approaching it through a canyon teeming with mountain goats, ibex, eagles and other wildlife, we hiked deep into the crevasse, which is usually crammed with ice well into July or even August.

And we camped under skies so free of pollution that the stars looked more brilliant than we had ever seen.

Then we flew back to Ulan Bator for another day of sightseeing before our flight home by way of Beijing.

When we got into O'Hare, Mongolia seemed so far away — until we saw the sign at customs and immigration giving us one last chance to dispose of all imported food.

And we remembered.

One last unintended souvenir — that lump of camel-milk cheese — ended up in the trash.

Michael McGuire is a Tribune staff writer.



THE ARTS

JANUARY 25, 1999 VOL. 153 NO. 3

Die Like a Dog

A lauded Mongolian film probes a mongrel's soul

By LEAH KOHLENBERG

Why do bad things happen to good dogs?

On one level, this is the central theme of *State of Dogs*, the odd tale of a Mongolian mongrel named Baasar.

But this joint Belgian-Mongolian production also tries to pack in a lot more—from mythology to metaphysical musings, all set against the backdrop of modern Mongolia. It is an ambitious effort that isn't always easy to follow on the screen. Yet there is something arresting about this small gem of a film, which has earned eight awards since its European release last year. (The film will be appearing in festivals across Asia this year.)

The movie is based on the Mongolian belief that dogs are the last stage before humans in the reincarnation process. Baasar is shot by a hunter in Ulan Bator; as he dies, his soul ruminates via voice-over narration on the cruelty of people. In an attempt to come to terms with his destiny, Baasar reflects upon his life. Along the way, we are introduced to a hodgepodge of Mongolian myths and characters—poets, wrestlers, a contortionist who serve as props in Baasar's quest for understanding.

Though billed as a documentary, the movie defies standard classification.

The players aren't actors, and most of the scenes are real—including the grim beginning, in which the camera follows a hunter on his murderous rounds. "Basically, this is a fable made into something real," says Peter Brosens, the movie's co-director and producer.

This is the first major film for Brosens and Mongolian co-director Dorjkhandyn Turmunkh, and this month's debut in Ulan Bator has both men nervous. "The film shows Mongolia in a not-so-positive light," says Turmunkh. Perhaps, but no one's saying the country is going to the dogs.



EDUCATION

UB Post

12-05-98

Teacher wins \$1000 to educate rural children

A teacher from remote Bayan-Olgii aimag headed home from Ulaanbaatar last week with the means to realize his dream — a ger school to teach herder children in their own communities.

N. Ciezdz, 27, is the winner of the "Let's Make Life Better" competition sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme. The contest challenged young Mongolians aged 20 to 30 to come up with a small project to improve their community. The winner would receive U.S. \$1000 to make it a reality.

The call elicited 580 project

proposals from across the country.

Ciezdz, who teaches at a primary school in the far-western aimag's Delvnuu soum, plans to set up a ger classroom in the summer pastures of 33 Kazakh families. Operating between June and September, it will teach basic literacy to 40 children who do not attend school because their families are reluctant to send them away, or cannot afford to pay for their board and supplies.

This sort of community-based distance education has been tried successfully in Mon-

golia's Gobi region by UNESCO, the United Nations' scientific, cultural and educational organization. Ciezdz's is believed to be the first initiative of its kind in Bayan-Olgii.

Local governors have already vowed to back the school by supplying the ger, leaving Ciezdz free to use his money for supplies, maintenance and a teacher's salary.

"I'm in a state of complete bliss," he said last week. "I didn't expect I would be the winner — my uncle was almost in tears."

UB Post

22-09-98

Nomadic studies gets a home of its own

The scattered world of nomadic studies got a permanent home last week, with the founding of the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilization.

An agreement to found the Institute was signed in Ulaanbaatar by official representatives of Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Indonesia and Turkey — all countries with nomadic heritages.

The Institute, supported by UNESCO, the United Nations Scientific, Cultural and Educational Organization, will be based in Ulaan-

baatar. It is the first international intergovernmental organization to have its headquarters in Mongolia.

The Institute aims to draw together work on the world's diverse nomadic cultures. It also hopes to be of practical benefit to nomads themselves, by expanding recognition of nomadic lifestyles, studying their development and helping integrate modern science and technology into the nomads' ancient way of life.

Mongolian delegates at last week's conference said the Institute serves a practical purpose at a time when Mon-



New Ulaanbaatar-based institute will study the unique lifestyle of the world's nomadic peoples.

golia must figure out how to preserve its nomadic culture in a rapidly changing world.

They say this country's

nomads face threats that are both economic and ecological. The ever-rising number of livestock in Mongolia,

which surpassed 30 million last year, has led to an unprecedented danger — the threat the country will run out of pasture land.

Academics and officials from the United States, Iran, Germany, France and Russia attended the September 15 to 17 inaugural conference of the Institute, which will be funded by UNESCO and contributions from member states.

B. Enkhtuvshin, vice-president of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, was elected the organization's first director.

Education project hits the airwaves

'Surch Amidarya' - 'Learning for Life' - a UNESCO Non-formal Distance Education Project launched its first Youth Program last week.

The project's main goals are to provide learning opportunities for unemployed young people in skills appropriate for small-scale business activities, and to give them aid in seeking employment.

3000 youth from different districts of Ulaanbaatar will be involved in this learning program. A radio lesson series has been developed in conjunction with a book called *Business Awareness and Market Economy*.

The radio programs will run for 10 weeks with each program repeated four times per week. Students can listen to the radio broadcast from home.

30 learning centres have been established for weekly tutorials and skill training activities. 120 youth workers have been trained for the tutorial positions.

Training programs include carpentry, car repair, sewing, shoe repair, baking, vegetable growing, hairdressing and other skills based on the learners' interests. Small-scale entertainment is also being

planned.

Students can re-enroll for further skill training activities after the 12-week session. The programme is being implemented in collaboration with the Ulaanbaatar City Office with a strong emphasis on creating cooperation with local businesses.

Some companies have already promised employment for youth at the completion of the training program.

The City Office is interested in turning a number of these learning centres into permanent youth centres.

In October of last year, a Youth

Social Action radio program was created for Ulaanbaatar FM - Blue Skies - in preparation for the Youth Program.

Based on the right of education for all, it aims at going beyond ordinary school curricula by providing young people with new and alternative chances to learn, especially those cast aside by the modern economy and schooling.

The radio programmes can be heard every Monday on Hookhtinger (FM) at 9am and on Mongol Radio (long-wave) at 12am and on Saturday at 21.30 on Hookhtinger.

Based on the right of education for all, it aims at going beyond ordinary school curricula by providing young people with new and alternative chances to learn,



Mongolian nomads lead the pack

By B. Indra

Mongolia is quickly coming to the forefront of a UNESCO supported programme to study nomadic civilisations.

Mongolia was introduced to

the project in 1992 when UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor paid a visit to this country and signed preliminary documents with President Ochirbat to launch the project.

A feasibility study was conducted by Professor Jacques

Legrand of France four years later. Legrand drew attention to the importance of conserving the unique historical and cultural heritage of nomads. He emphasised the undertaking of actions to develop appropriate elements of modernisation in an effort to improve the way of life of nomadic populations. Mongolia and France have been the two sites where UNESCO has hosted conferences to further develop the project.

The International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilisation was officially launched in September 1998 when five member States of UNESCO signed an agreement at a conference in Ulaanbaatar. The signatories included Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Turkey. Observers of the conference were the USA, France, India, Iran and Russia.

The inaugural meeting established rules and regulations for the institute. An action programme through the end of 1999 was established. More than 10 scientific organisations and scholars from Germany, France and the USA applied for membership in the institute.

Organisers have defined nomadic cultures into three categories. Current nomadic way of life, a nomadic history or nations involved with the study of nomadic peoples. Indonesia stands as a unique member; its nomads conducted inter-island travel across the vast Indonesian archipelago.

In September 1999 the first

international symposium of the Institute will be called to discuss the present situation of nomadic civilisations and its perspectives. Papers by scholars will be published by Indiana University prior to the symposium. The main course of the Institute in the current year will be directed at creating information centre facilities.

The Document Centre is currently located in the 7th floor of the Cultural Palace. The Centre, which will soon provide a web site, provides an opportunity to study nomads as well as publish materials on the subject. The centre invites all interested institutions and scholars to become members of the Institute.

"The question what the nomadic herders of the 21st century will look like shall depend very much on the progress of modern technology. The Institute should function on the cross roads of international science for which internet and modern communication shall play an important role," said Director of the International Institute for the study of Nomadic Civilisations B. Enkhtuvshin.

"We intend to make the institute strong this year, to connect it with other member countries and to lay the foundations for the information centre," Enkhtuvshin added.

For more information contact, Prof. B. Enkhtuvshin. Ph: 327827, fax: 321638. E mail: mas@magicnet.mn



B. Enkhtuvshin (left) meets with Federico Mayor of UNESCO.

Landmark school celebrates fifth year

English for Special Purpose Institute (ESPI) marked its 5th founding anniversary last week.

ESPI is a non-profit institution committed to helping the Mongolian community in the field of language training as part of the economic reform programme.

ESPI is the largest English language training school in this country. The Institute launched its activities in 1990 as a part of a UNDP project. In November 1993 it became self-financed.

From 1994-1996 ESPI operated as a project implementing body of the British government. ESPI maintains close working contacts with the British Embassy, Soros Foundation and other overseas organisations. The Institute conducts six main English courses

including business, economics, banking, finance, veterinary science, medicine, general, scientific and technical English. Courses last from one to three months.

"The education programme is changeable depending on the requirements made by applicants. The students are provided with educational references which are different from other schools," said ESPI Director Saranchimeg.

ESPI has enrolled nearly 2000 students and educates 500 people a year. 60 percent are employed by government agencies. 30 percent of their payment is made by Soros Foundation, the British Embassy and Tacis. ESPI is expected to launch courses for lawyers, rural language teachers and TOEFL exam students, in the coming year.

UNESCO prepares for literacy tests

The UNESCO 'learning for life' project team began its work on literacy tests last week, the testing is aimed at young people mainly in rural areas.

The first steps have been made to 'test out' the literacy examination, which will show if it is appropriate for the target group; this procedure will be distributed to all aimags. The literacy surveys are being conducted to better understand the

need for literacy training in many parts of Mongolia.

Increasing numbers of school drop-outs, decreasing opportunities for education and a lack of reading material in rural areas have contributed to rising illiteracy in this country. Based on the literacy testing, books and radio programmes will be developed for literacy classes within the non-formal education system of Mongolia.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mongol Messenger

06-06-98

Human rights report completed

The United Nations Development Programme and the Mongolian government have compiled the first Human Rights Report in Mongolia.

The project, completed on

April 30, was noted as an historic achievement for a democratic Mongolia. The Mongolian Government has decided to publish a Human Rights Report every two years.

Mongol Messenger

08-04-98

Hovd receives book on its round-the-world journey

A book recently passed through Darkhan Uul, Hovd Aimag on a journey that carry it around the world.

The Amnesty International signature book, which received its first Mongolian signing from Parliamentary Justice Committee Chief Ch. Otgonbayar, will collect 11 million names on its worldwide jaunt.

Signatures in the book represent a worldwide fight

against human rights violations. When completed, the book will be the world's largest. Some of the signatures to be included in the

book will be

U.S. President Bill Clinton, South African President Nelson Mandela and French President Jacques Chirac.



國際特赦組織

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ АМНИСТИЯ

منظمة العفو الدولية

Amnesty

will hand the completed book to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on December 10, International Human Rights Day,

Mongol Messenger

16-12-98

Mongolia boasts no prisoners of conscience on HRD

On December 10, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mongolia signed the Human Rights Covenant.

The document aims to confirm the joint efforts of the Mongolian government and the United Nations to protect all Mongolians from human rights abuses.

The memorandum was signed by Acting Justice Minister S. Batchuluun and UN representatives.

The signing only emphasised Mongolia's feat of having no prisoners of

consciousness in its jails.

In other UN news...

The UN General Assembly affirmed the resolution on Mongolia's nuclear-weapons-free status on December 4.

The assembly said that Mongolia's status will enhance stability and confidence-building in the region.

The resolution appealed to the five major nuclear weapon states, and asked them to cooperate with Mongolia's resolution for independence, and nuclear free status.

Decendents of politically repressed collect their due

But Mongolian Exoneration Foundation claims the Supreme court decision violates the constitution; it seeks more retribution

By D. Narantuya

The law of 'exonerating victims of political repression,' a bill which will provide monetary compensation to the victims of this century's political purges, will be put into action this month.

Since its adoption, parliamentary talks have been held to determine who has the right to claim damages from political repression. On March 25 The Supreme Court proposed its official line on the matter. However, the Mongolian Exoneration Foundation, and the Research Centre of Politically Repressed considered that the State Supreme Court violated the Mongolian Constitution, adopted laws and articles of International Convention of Human Rights delivered by the United Nations.

The Supreme Court indicated in its ninth article that a child,

adopted or natural, of a political victim has the right to be a claimant. But this violates the third point of the 16th article of the Mongolian constitution which states 'If the State and its bodies appropriate private property on the basis of exclusive public need, they shall make due compensation and payment,' and the second point of the 14th article which states 'No person shall be discriminated against on the basis of religion and opinion.'

It also violates warrantable inheritors' rights which is mentioned in the 403rd article of ley civile, and the first and second points of the 17th article of Human Rights Declaration which states 'Owning partially and confiscating people's property is prohibited.'

"The explanation of the State Supreme Court is violating the interests of 15,000 relatives of 20,000 lamas who were politically repressed. At that time, it was impossible to make a testament for the politically repressed. So the recompensation of those who had no children should be granted to their brothers and sisters' children," said M. Rentsen, the Director of Political Victims' Research Centre.

"Within 5 days, after the explanation was made, 62 people made requests to the Exoneration Foundation for renewing their legal rights," said D. Baasanjav, the leader of the Mongolian

Exoneration Foundation.

Over 1000 people attended a protest, organised by the foundation, to express discontent over the Supreme Court decision.

"Due to this protest, the number of those who will receive compensation is going to increase," said Mr Baasanjav.

"It is serious and caused bad consequences for traditional humanism, for it has some certain classification of relatives. But it is not a mistake that cannot be corrected. If the State Supreme Court itself agrees its explanation is wrong, they can invalidate it. We want the State Supreme Court to reconsider," said Mr Rentsen.

"If the decision is reversed, it is possible that more money from the State budget will be allotted. Tg3 billion from the State budget is planned for compensation in 1998. Our estimates show that Tg7 billion are needed to finalise compensation," said Ts. Elbegdorj, the Head of the State Commission of Organising Exoneration.

Official figures show that 35,800 people have suffered political repression during the purges in Mongolia.

This number is broken down to include 16,700 middle lamas, 1516 aristocrats, 641 herdsman, 206 soldiers, and 400 unemployed people. 20,000 of those repressed were aged 25-70. There are currently 272 survivors of the political repression in Mongolia.

UB Post

15-12-98

Human Rights in Mongolia

Human Rights' Day, on December 10, was acknowledged in Mongolia this year at the UN One World Conference Series. The conference was attended by children, aged 15-19, from 21 aimags and 7 UB districts, and it addressed the issue of human rights, specifically children's rights.

During this time of transition to a free market economy, the state of human rights in this country is less than desirable. The Trade Unions' Association of Mongolia considers the main obstacles to human rights to be inadequate salaries, pensions and social

benefits. More importantly, many Mongolian children are not provided with the basic rights to life, education etc.

Conference participants felt that children's rights are violated because of a lack of awareness among the nation's population. In addition, they thought that children's rights are violated mostly by adults.

A disabled teenage boy's televised plea to the adult world "Please do not punish us, the children" is one of the example of such a violation. This boy was pushed out of a train for traveling without a ticket. Sadly, the cold winter

weather in the deserted steppe cost him his arms and leg. A number of similar cases of human rights violations can be found in Mongolia.

According to statistics compiled by the Movement for Women and Democracy, over 3,000 children were living in the streets in 1996. Seventy-nine per cent of girls in the streets are sexually active and 82 per cent have been raped.

Two years later, the number of street children still has not declined. Clearly, there is a need for human rights to remain on the Mongolian agenda.

Arts & Society
InReview

Museums:
Genocide on Display
By Lincoln Kaye

03/05/1998

Far Eastern Economic Review

Page 43

(Copyright (c) 1998, Dow Jones & Company, Inc.)

Museum of Victims of Political Repression. Behind Foreign Ministry, Ulan Bator, Mongolia. Tel. (976-1)

Nothing about the rough-hewn wooden exterior of the Genden House suggests that it's a holocaust memorial. Its forsythia-yellow clapboards contrast with the stodgy grey stucco of the surrounding ministries and blocks of flats. The building seems a relic from an earlier, more innocent age of pre-Stalinist architecture.

But loss of innocence is what this museum's all about. Inside, two storeys of exhibits chronicle one of history's worst genocides: the killing of some 14% of Mongolia's population -- priests, intellectuals, property owners and factional rivals of the ruling clique -- from the 1920s, when the Soviets began to dominate the country, until the end of World War II.

Under Soviet tutelage, Mongolia grew so closed and paranoid that these crimes remained unmentionable inside the country and unheard-of outside. Yet the searing experience of those decades must certainly affect virtually any Mongol a foreign visitor might meet, since most families were touched by the bloodshed. Other museums and official tourist literature still gloss over this period, but at the Genden House, it's spelled out in excruciating detail.

Mongolians throng the museum searching for clues about their missing kin. Many are willing to discuss their quest with foreigners. It's hardly an upbeat tourist attraction, but well worth the \$1 admission fee for the insight to be gained.

An early casualty of the purges was ex-Premier Genden, whose home now houses the museum. Genden (like many Mongols, he used no surname) was a veteran of the freedom struggles against Chinese and White-Russian domination. When he balked at Stalin's command to liquidate Mongolia's entire Buddhist priesthood, he was summoned to Moscow for "consultations." He never returned.

Now that Mongolia has its first elected noncommunist government in nearly 70 years, the floodgates of national remembrance have been thrown open. Genden's daughter, Tserendulom, has made the house into a memorial to the thousands who were purged.

"For so long, we couldn't even talk about these people," says Tserendulom, a retired teacher. "It's as though they'd never even existed. It's our urgent duty to finally give them back their faces and names."

Names fill most of the museum's first floor -- wall after wall of them, all neatly lettered in colour-coded paint: yellow for lamas, red for communist partisans and blue for "civilian" victims. Plenty of space is left for more names as researchers sift further information from newly opened state archives or family members come forward with fresh revelations.

Even more affecting than the victim rosters, though, are the memorabilia on the second floor. There are a couple of 1930s-vintage anti-clerical propaganda posters and a ghoulish diorama of a torture chamber. But mostly, the display cases just show poignant souvenirs of the victims themselves: snuff bottles, spectacles, diaries, rosaries, garments, letters and the other flotsam of daily life. Grieving families secretly hoarded these memorabilia for decades before the museum offered them a venue for public mourning. Sepia photos and hand-tinted glass portraits cover the gallery walls. Visitors can almost feel the victims' eyes tracking them from room to room.

Interspersed with these displays, the museum preserves the tidy ledgers in which national-security functionaries carefully logged arrest quotas and confiscated property. There are even a couple of death certificates on display -- ironically dated decades after the event they purport to chronicle. Most families, though, never received official notification after their relatives went missing,

Oyuna

Monday, 12 April 1999 09:38:31

02:49 11 Apr RTRS-FEATURE-Hundreds die but Mongolia prisons improve

By Irja Halasz

ULAN BATOR, April 11 (Reuters) - More than 1,500 people have died in Mongolia's grim jails in the past six years, many from starvation and more from illnesses stemming from appalling conditions.

The Executive Agency for Prison Sentences (EAPS), which runs Mongolia's prisons, said recently 242 prisoners died last year -- four percent of the prison population of 6,172.

The figure may be shocking, but it was 100 fewer than in 1997 as reforms began to improve the lives of prisoners.

"I do not call this a victory yet. We are going to make further and more thorough changes," EAPS director L. Sanjaasuren told Reuters in an interview.

The agency figures showed a total of 1,523 prison deaths in the past six years, 1,451 from illness. The worst year was 1996, when 340 people died.

The leading cause of deaths was tuberculosis with 611 victims, while 689 died from a variety of other diseases.

And 151 died of starvation.

Last year, nine people died of starvation and 105 of tuberculosis.

Sanjaasuren said the decline in deaths stemmed from reforms aimed at bringing prison standards closer to United Nations requirements.

"Regulations, followed until 1998, were those designed in a system of political prisoners," Sanjaasuren said. Now, "prisoners are there only for serving their sentence, not for receiving a double punishment".

POLICE DETENTION A BASIC PROBLEM

Sanjaasuren said many convicts came into prisons already ill or starving because of appalling conditions in police detention, which was frequently lengthy.

He said in police cells -- freezing in the winter and steaming hot in the summer -- people became weak from lack of fresh air, water, food and medical care.

"People become sources of illness, and especially because of no ventilation the respiratory infections are spread," he said. "Only when you get in a very bad condition can you get to hospital."

A detention centre diet included a cup of tea and a piece of bread in the morning and in the evening, while a cup of millet soup and a cup of tea were served for lunch.

"Once you are there and have become ill, there is no chance you get healthy before you get out," said a 35-year-old former prison guard, who spent six months in police detention as a suspect in 1997, but was finally released without being charged.

Some people confessed to crimes just to get out of the detention, he said.

"To get away from those conditions, they'd rather go to a prison," he said. "Getting into prison after that is like going out into the sunshine," he said.

RIGHTS GROUP SAYS SITUATION STILL CRITICAL

"Amnesty International is very concerned about the welfare of prisoners in Mongolia," Rory Mungoven told Reuters in a written statement from the organisation's London headquarters.

"In recent years we have reported on terrible prison conditions which amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and have led directly and indirectly to the death of many prisoners by starvation and other diseases," he said.

He credited the Mongolian government for some positive steps in recent years, such as promising to remove the requirement for prisoners to work for their basic subsistence.

"But clearly the situation remains critical," he said.

"Obviously, we appreciate the difficulties Mongolia faces in terms of resources and infrastructure, but the government should seek international advice and assistance to help with this problem," Mungoven said.

"While Mongolia has made great progress as a new democracy, its treatment of the most vulnerable is the real test of its commitment to human rights," he said.

MORE ATTENTION TO FOOD DESPITE BUDGET PROBLEMS

Sanjaasuren said that last year, Mongolia's prisons started to order food from private companies to improve quality, and started to pay more attention to its distribution.

For a 60 prisoner unit, the state should provide about 26,000 togrogs a day (\$25), which buys 11 kg (24 lb) of meat, 14 kg of flour, 10 kg of vegetables and salt.

However, investigations revealed daily diets as low as 683 calories in some jails, Sanjaasuren said. Mongolian law requires a daily intake of 2,900-3,900 calories for prisoners.

He said the state had failed to pay its full food budget to the prisons. Prisons receive about 59 percent of it, while the remaining 41 percent comes from prisoner labour.

About 40 percent of the prisoners work, most of them in timber mills and construction.

The income of prison units varied between four million and 15 million togrogs a year. The best working units, from time to time, are allowed to use a part of their incomes to buy extra meat, he said.

The reforms also had improved other living conditions, such as ventilation and sanitation. Prisoners are now living in two to six person cells, have new clothes, soap and toilet paper.

Sanjaasuren said the 1,100 guards at Mongolia's 29 prisons were being retrained and prisoners were no longer shaved bald, required to stand before officials, or beaten up.

"But it takes a long time to change the methods and behaviour of officers who were used to the old system."

(\$1 = 1,041.24 togrogs)

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Sunday, 11 April 1999 02:49:08

RTRS [nSP87799]

Prisoners receive human rights, but not much else

By Ch. Baatarbeel

The Mongolian prison system - once an abominable institution of human rights abuses - has improved significantly this decade, according to B. Delgermaa, the Head of the Human Rights sub-committee to Parliament.

However, she indicated that Mongolian jails have a long way to go before they can be considered suitably humanitarian.

Ms Delgermaa noted that the adoption of article 16 to the constitution in 1992 has been the impetus for the improvements. The article states that all Mongolians have the right to a healthy life.

"Mongolia is bound by the constitution, and every person falls under its decree. Even prisoners are entitled to basic laws of human rights which our constitution holds," explained Ms Delgermaa.

One of the most prominent affects of article 16 has been the elimination of the category of political prisoner, which falls under item ten.

"Mongolia has no political prisoners, a fact we are quite proud of. The old system of jailing political dissidents is completely gone. Yet our prisons still face problems, most of which concern

health and sanitation," Ms Delgermaa said.

According to a United Nations report, Mongolia's prison facilities are considered 'average.' Disease and malnutrition have been the major causes for concern. 1260 Mongolian prisoners died between 1992-1997. The main reasons for death are said to be emaciation and

Disease has been attributed to poor sanitation. Typically, cells are cramped and dirty, food quality is low, and air ventilation is non-existent. The prison diet only provides 1600 calories per day. The World Health Organisation average is 2500.

"Despite these problems, we do have some positive points. The

old system of shaved heads, uniforms and wooden beds has been done away with," said Ms Delgermaa. "In the past, prisoners were forced to state their names and crimes upon entering a room.

This violation of personal privacy has also ended."

Mongolia has 26 prisons, including death row, juvenile and women prisons. The nation's prison population is 6000.

"In the past, prisoners were forced to state their names and crimes upon entering a room."

B. Delgermaa
Head of the Human Rights
sub-committee to Parliament

tuberculosis.

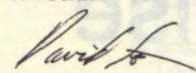
Until 1991, prisons were self-financed from inmate labour. Prison income paid for food and clothing. It also provided prisoners with exercise and healthy activities.

But this decade has seen the state take financial control, self-support has been restricted to a minimum. Jails receive less money than they made under the old system, and there are complaints that inactivity has created a hostile environment within the facilities.

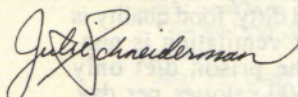
"There has been a lot of unrest amongst the prisoners. They have nothing to do, and this inactivity has led to depression as well as aggression. Mental disorders have noticeably risen," indicated Ms Delgermaa

A note from the editors

A book of this size requires the cooperation of many people. UNDP would like to take this opportunity to grateously thank the following journalists and publications for granting us permission to reprint these articles. We would like to thank all of the contributors, both local and international, for their patience and assistance with this challenging project. The call went out for articles in April 1999 and we were overwhelmed by the positive response from journalists and publications worldwide. We have been impressed by the enthusiasm for this book and hope it proves to be a joy to read.



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